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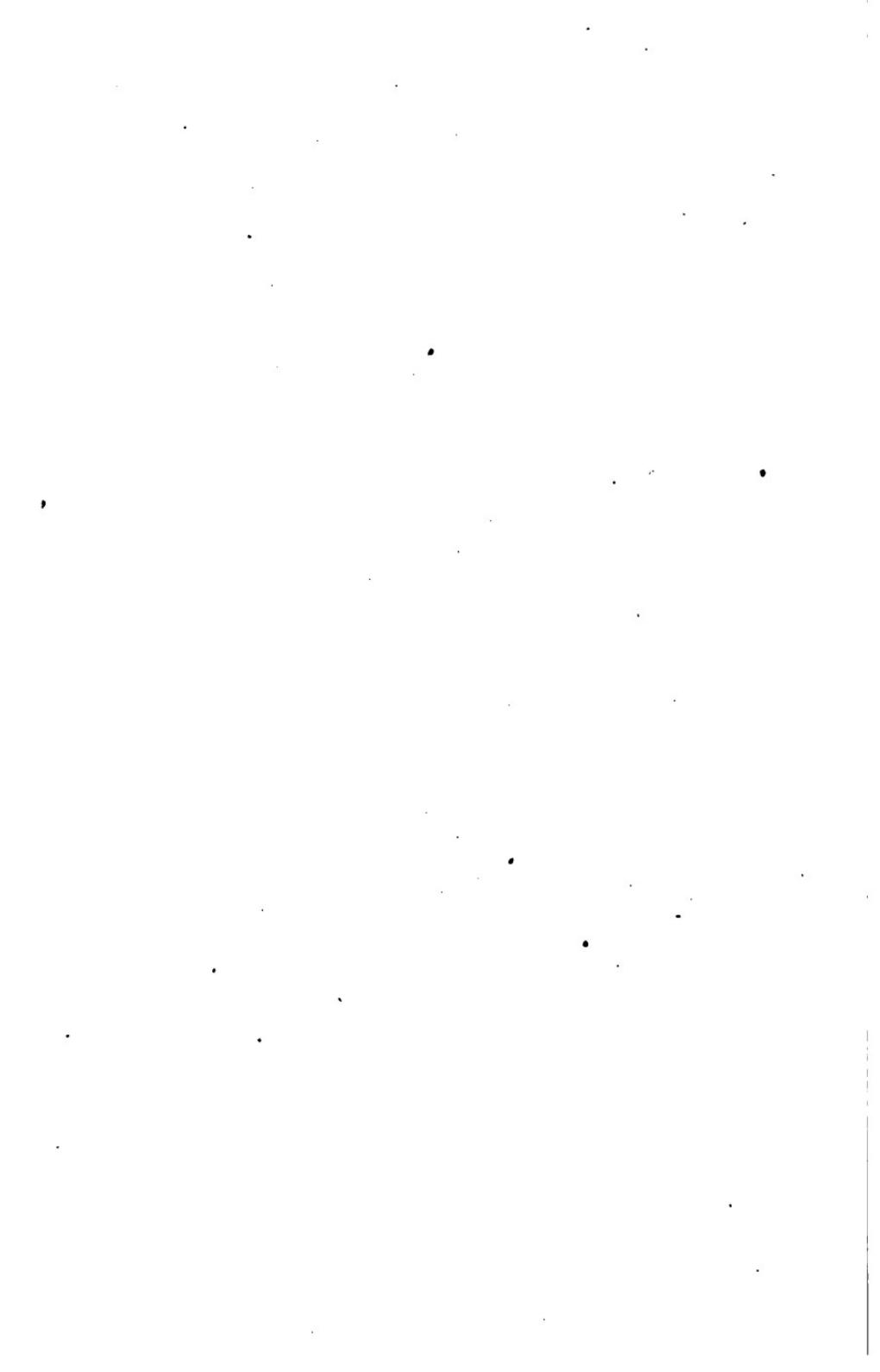




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GARDENHURST



VOL. II.

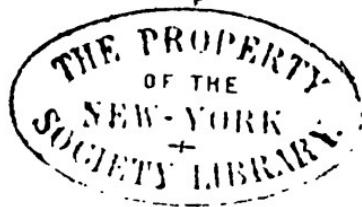
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GARDENHURST

A Novel.

BY

ANNA C. STEELE



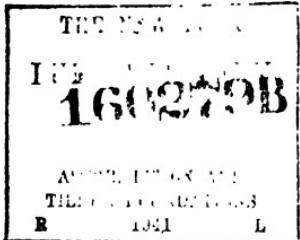
IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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1867.

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GARDENHURST.

CHAPTER I.

"Behold the sport of Love ; when he's imperious,
Behold the slave of Love!"

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

MEANWHILE Mrs. Herbert was still detained at Brighton by her child's illness ; her life was very irksome to her in the long, dull days she was forced to spend in this lonely, glaring town. The only thing that consoled her for her absence from London was the reflection that Geoffry was no longer there.

All day long, while the sun beat fiercely down the white line of houses on the Parade, Sophy remained in seclusion within doors ; seated by her little girl's bed, she read me-

chanically a few fairy legends out of gaily illustrated books, but was so distracted by little odds and ends of memory, which kept bringing Geoffry's eyes and Geoffry's hair between her gaze and the page containing the adventures of "Prince Glorious," that she gave but small attention to the story, and was constantly corrected by her little daughter for inaccuracies both of plot and language.

"Prince Glorious didn't marry Marcella, the bad girl; he married Rosecleer, the good princess," cried little Miss Herbert, indignantly ; and then she told her father how silly mamma had been not to know who Prince Glorious really married. So Mr. Herbert would sit down and read the tale himself; the love he felt for the child shining out under his grizzled eyebrows, and speaking in the tenderness of voice with which, fully entering into her eager interest, he recited correctly the adventures of her favourite prince.

Mr. Herbert came to Brighton as often



as his parliamentary duties permitted ; he would willingly have come oftener, for his whole heart was in the soft gloom of the chamber where his little daughter lay ; but the Session was a busy one, and as there was no longer any positive danger attached to the child's case he did not like to shirk his work in the House at a time when the faces of his fellow-legislators were growing sharper, and their hair greyer, every anxious night they debated.

Mrs. Herbert was not in the least annoyed at the child's want of appreciation of her mother's little efforts to amuse her.

"She likes to have you with her best, George," Sophy would say, candidly. "I don't think I know how to get on with children."

She continued to do what she thought was her duty ; and if dreaming away hours in the sick chamber while the child slept, occasionally bathing her temples with eau de cologne when she woke, and flitting in

and out of the room with restless steps and pre-occupied mind at all hours of the day, was Sophy's duty, she certainly did it to perfection.

In the evening Mrs. Herbert would stroll down to the sea, and dip her white fingers languidly into the dark wet meshes of seaweed flung up on the strand, or gaze with a yearning, wistful look in her brown eyes at the rosy flush that suffused not only the western clouds, but the dark waters that lay under them, and the grey line of distant houses that curved round the shore. There was no one to interrupt Mrs. Herbert's meditations as she reclined on the shingle on those summer evenings, her fine arm resting in the folds of a soft cashmere shawl, and her head bent over the pages of a French novel. The cliff was deserted by all save a few foot-passengers, or an occasional invalid chair, whose occupant was trolled slowly up and down the parade, seeking to imbibe health and

strength from the salt sea winds. The shore itself was even more solitary. Here and there a boat pushed up out of reach of the tide, caught on its sea-worn sides, like the waves, a transient glory from some golden rift of cloud that floated over it. A shrimp-fisher breasting the waters, and an old sailor peering through his glass at some vanishing sail—these were the only companions of Sophy's solitude.

One evening Mrs. Herbert was lounging in her usual attitude on a raised mound of shingle, lying on her side, her head resting on one hand, and the other inserted within her book to restrain the fluttering of the leaves. The day had been sultry, and the air was still mild and oppressive, although a slight breeze was coming from the sea; so Mrs. Herbert made no effort to repossess herself of the protection of her light shawl, which was partly dragged by her position, and partly lifted by the wind away from her shoulders,

until the rounded voluptuous outline of her figure was fully revealed.

She wore one of her favourite soft, grey silk dresses—a dress which, fitting close from the hip to the knee, lay in crumpled folds round her feet. Her hat had fallen from her head, so that the luxuriance of her rippled hair was unfettered by pressure, and Sophy had buried one white hand in its opulent meshes just above the pink ear and its gold pendant. She was not reading, nor yet thinking. She was satisfied for awhile to bask in the balminess of the twilight hour without mixing definite thought with that golden haze in the west, the light run of those rippling waves, and the warm air that filled her with such a sense of content.

Drowsiness came upon her at last, and the lids drooped lower, until the fused lines of the eyelashes threw a spattered shadow under them; the head rested more heavily on the upraised arm, and the rounded

bosom sank against a ridge of stones, cautiously as a bird sinks its breast on a doubtful perch.

Mrs. Herbert being thus oblivious, did not notice that within the last half hour the beach had become tenanted by other visitors than the customary shrimp-boy and the observant tar. Ere she had slept ten minutes two gentlemen had begun to descend the cliff above where she reclined, and were coming towards her. They did not, however, catch sight of the fair sleeper until by a turn of the cliff they were brought so suddenly near her that the foremost one nearly trod on the silken hem of her dress.

The young blush with facility, and Gerald Lisle, who was the first to arrest his footsteps, crimsoned over with excess of astonishment. "By Jove, it's——," he began, but his companion checked his expression of surprise by drawing him softly backwards.

"Let's look at her," he said. And accordingly, for a few moments, while Gerald was framing some speech with which to judiciously awaken the sleeping beauty, Alfred Cadogan feasted his eyes on what was even to his experienced gaze the most beautiful object he had ever seen.

The very imperfections of her form—the too great breadth of throat and bust—were attractions to this man, whose Eastern origin sometimes would assert itself in spite of his Christian education, and his trained intellect. The one had taught him to conceal, the other to control, the savage nature of the passions he had inherited by virtue of descent, but the quietest of volcanoes may occasionally send up a flash to warn people of the nature of the green heights on which they build their habitations, and those who knew Alfred Cadogan best were apt to suspect (only to suspect, for he was wealthy, and wealth always carries such an air of virtue on the face of it) that he was

not the man they would like their pretty wives or young daughters to associate much with.

Xerxes Cadogan was unjust when he called his son "plain." At any rate, had he lived to see that son grow to manhood, he must have retracted that unfavourable opinion, or at least have qualified it.

Alfred, the son, was not so regularly handsome as had been Xerxes, the father ; his features were not so delicately correct in outline, nor his eyes so large, as those of the deceased Greek ; but Alfred's face was not without its attractions, his eyes were very dark, nearly black, they were shrouded by heavy almond-shaped lids, and they were surmounted by the most delicate pair of arched eyebrows ; his nose was straight and fine, but the lips were heavy and colourless ; these, however, were partly concealed by the black moustache that lay over them. In person he was slight, too slight, in truth, for manly beauty, but his

tailor had done somewhat to hide these defects by the judicious amount of padding he had applied to Mr. Cadogan's coat at the termination of the latter's falling shoulders. The complexion had a yellow, solid tinge about it, like that of old marble; it was only under the influence of very strong emotion that any colour ever came into Alfred's face, and then it was a little faint pink tinge, like that which blushes on the smooth sides of a Jenneting apple.

In dress and in manner he was as quiet and as faultless now as in those days when he first made the acquaintance of his half-brother, and was so shocked at the appearance presented by that sunburnt youth, as the latter kicked his legs in the foam of the river, and grinned his red lips from ear to ear, at the care with which Alfred moved his little feet from ledge to ledge; only that the self-contained manner, and the foppishness in dress, sat far better on his twenty-eight years than they had done on

his boyhood of sixteen. Altogether Mr. Cadogan was decidedly attractive, and women who were not penetrating enough to observe (or who, if they did observe, did not dislike) the cunning that sometimes lurked in his narrow, dark eyes, and the conceited smile that occasionally played round his curled moustache, were wont to think that Mr. Cadogan was a charming man, and had "oh, such a beautiful, low, soft voice."

His voice *was* very low-toned, and pleasant in ordinary conversation, but it was thin in quality, and if anything caused him to raise his tones, they became harsh and shrill. Like Mrs. Herbert, Mr. Cadogan was not in the habit of displaying much emotion in public, accordingly this defect was rarely noticed. When he looked at Sophy, lying asleep as we have described, the faint, pink tinge rose to his cheek, and when Gerald Lisle made a forward move, to awaken the sleeper, Mr. Cadogan restrained him.

“No,” he whispered. “Let us go;” and, taking the unwilling Gerald by the arm, he withdrew him softly, only turning once as they neared the curve of the cliff, to take another glance at the recumbent form on the beach.

“Why didn’t you let me wake her?” asked Gerald. “It is Mrs. Herbert, you know, that handsome woman I spoke to you about,—I would have introduced you to her.”

“It is much better that you should do that in her own drawing-room,” answered his wiser friend. “Women of the world don’t like to be seen *en déshabille*. It’s all very well for very youthful Musidoras to unconsciously reveal their perfections to their peeping adorers, but modern beauties like to be conscious to an inch of the loneliness they unveil. Mrs. Herbert would probably have been startled and provoked at our intruding on her at a moment when she was ‘off guard,’ and although *I* thought

her lovely in that unstudied attitude, she would probably fancy she had been caught at a disadvantage, and that idea would have made her angry, not with herself, but with us."

"But she will catch cold if she sleeps there any longer," objected Gerald.

"We will call at her house now," his friend said; "and finding her not at home; you shall beseech the servant to seek for her at her usual haunt at this hour; your request shall be backed by two half-crowns, you shall pay one and I the other."

"No," said Gerald, true to his instinct of speculation, "let's toss who shall pay both."

"As you like," said Mr. Cadogan, "but I shall win; I almost always do win chances."

Win he did; and when Mrs. Herbert's servant received the little bribe which came out of Gerald's hand, he asked them civilly to walk up and sit down while

the under-footman went to look for his mistress.

Mr. Cadogan had not turned over many leaves of the photograph book that rested on Mrs. Herbert's writing-desk, when the servant returned with a message from Mrs. Herbert to the effect that she would be in shortly, and begged that Mr. Lisle would await her return.

"Who is this fair-haired young giant?" asked Mr. Cadogan of Gerald, as he continued to inspect some half-dozen portraits that bore a strong resemblance to each other. These portraits represented a broad-shouldered young man, whose close-cropped curls rippled beneath the edge of a forage cap, and who wore the undress frock-coat of an officer in the Guards.

"Don't you know?" said Mr. Lisle in great surprise; "why that is Geoffry—Geoffry Adair."

"Not at all like him," said Alfred, decidedly, and not in the least losing his

presence of mind. "At any rate if they are, he must be much altered since I saw him."

"How long is that ago?" asked Gerald, with a little curiosity in his voice.

When Mr. Cadogan had rendered his new friend that important service about a fortnight back, he had insinuated that he was acting as a kind of proxy for Geoffry, and Mr. Lisle had been too grateful for the timely assistance to cavil much at the terms on which it was offered, more especially as his new acquaintance further intimated that he should be willing to renew his assistance until Gerald should be "in funds again;" but it certainly did seem odd to the latter that he could never remember to have heard Adair speak of his half-brother.

Geoffry was on the Continent, so he could not be appealed to; however, as Gerald nobly observed, "'Tisn't as if the fellow had done *me* out of money, you know," so he resigned himself to the

fascination of Cadogan's society, and was even now beginning to like him so well that he had almost forgotten (as Cadogan intended he should) to inquire whether or not his new acquaintance was accredited by Geoffry's friendship.

Mr. Cadogan's incautious remark had recalled the question, but Gerald's inquiry remained unanswered, for even as he asked it the door opened, and Mrs. Herbert entered the room.

She had made but a slight alteration in her dress, as she wished to convey the impression that she had come straight from the beach ; but her cheeks had a somewhat warmer tinge on them (possibly due to the exercise of walking), and while the shawl and hat were hung over one arm, there was the addition of a white boa round her neck, the fleecy framework of which was eminently becoming to the brilliant face that shone out above it.

"I am very glad to see you again, Mr.

Lisle," she said, graciously, Gerald introduced his friend, whose name Sophy did not quite hear ; and all three fell into easy conversation,—Gerald explaining that he had come to Brighton for a couple of days to see a brother officer, who was ill there, and that his friend had kindly borne him company to alleviate the dullness of such a journey taken alone.

"Had I known how little Lisle could require the consolation of my presence here, I should not have accompanied him, and I should thus have missed the pleasure of being introduced to you," said Alfred Cadogan, in that sweet, low voice which accorded so well with the dimness of the twilight hour.

"Am I to infer that you regret or congratulate yourself that you acceded to Mr. Lisle's request?" said Sophy, languidly.

"I don't know," he answered, shortly ; and for once Mr. Cadogan spoke truth ; he did *not* know whether to be glad or sorry

that he had put himself in the way of this woman's fascinations, which already affected him with the sort of dreamy, giddy sensation that assails one's brain on the first inhalation of chloroform.

" You are looking at my photograph book," Mrs. Herbert said, rather astonished at the abruptness of his last observation ; " do you find any one you know there ? "

" Oh yes, several," he answered ; then, with a furtive look at her from under his heavy lids, he added : " My half-brother, Geoffry Adair, ought to be much flattered, Mrs. Herbert. I see you possess no less than—let me see—one, two, four, six different portraits of him ! "

He observed how, at the mention of his brother's name, Sophy's face flushed, and then that the flush faded away from her mellow cheeks only to be succeeded by excessive pallor ; he drew his deductions, and cursed Geoffry accordingly.

" So it is he, is it ? " he said to himself ;

while Mrs. Herbert, half rising from her seat, said eagerly :

“ Your brother—Geoffry. What, then, are you——?”

“ My name is Cadogan,” he said. “ I’m afraid, Lisle, you could not have been very distinct in your form of introduction.”

“ Oh, how very stupid of me!” cried Mrs. Herbert, taking the blame to herself. “ I heard, but I did not quite understand. And so you are really Alfred Cadogan, are you? Geoffry’s half-brother?”

“ I hope,” he said, softly, “ that when you have known me a little longer, Mrs. Herbert, you will recognise in me other claims to your consideration, independent of my relationship to Geoffry, as you call him.”

“ I call him Geoffry,” answered Mrs. Herbert, coldly, “ because I have known him ever since he was a boy. He is one of my—and Mr. Herbert’s—most intimate friends.”

She laid a slight emphasis on Mr. Herbert's name while uttering the above, but she did not in the least deceive her listener. She could impose on Gerald Lisle and other men of his type so successfully that the very inflexion of her voice would lead them astray as to her feelings concerning Captain Adair, or any other person concerning whom she wished to conceal her real feelings; but with Geoffry's half-brother she had to deal with one as quick and wily as herself.

He said to himself, "of course he is Mr. Herbert's most intimate friend. The very first thing a clever woman does when she embarks in an affair of this kind is to make her husband partly responsible for it. But," he answered aloud, "that he had no doubt but that his brother fully justified the confidence Mr.—(he made a slight pause here)—and Mrs. Herbert reposed in him."

He fancied that this little bit of satire

would “go home,” and so it did, but not for the reason he imagined. Mrs. Herbert looked for a moment as if some one had struck her across the face; but it was not the thought of her treachery towards her husband which thus agitated her, it was the angry pang with which she recalled the fact that Captain Adair had in truth been, if anything, over faithful to Mr. Herbert’s trust in him.

The evening closed in very pleasantly on the trio in Sophy’s drawing-room, and just when the pier-lights began to sparkle through the grey-coloured gloom of sky and sea, Mr. Herbert came home (it was Wednesday, and this was one of his visiting-days to Brighton), in time to cordially indorse his wife’s invitation to the two gentlemen to come and dine with them that night.

“This is one of the few evenings that I can ask for the pleasure of your company,” said Mrs. Herbert, looking fondly at her

husband, "as I never entertain even the oldest friends at dinner without George's co-operation."

George was pleased at this proper little speech. He liked that Sophy should put forward his claims to attention, and to herself, and he said :

" Yes, to be sure ; this is almost the only night I spend at home, I hope you will come, Lisle, and your friend, too !"

Mr. Cadogan smiled when he got outside the door (they had accepted the invitation, and were now going to their hotel to dress), and said, speaking to himself : " As if a woman who can spend two or three hours of twilight in the dusky gloom of an unlighted boudoir, unchaperoned by anyone but her lovely self, wasn't fifty times more dangerous than when she smiles behind cut-glass and silver épergnes, with monsieur her husband opposite, and messieurs the footmen behind her !"

" Hey ! what are you talking about,

Cadogan ?” said Gerald, cheerfully. He had been lighting a cigar during Alfred’s commentary on Mrs. Herbert’s “little bit of propriety,” and so had missed hearing it.

“ Nothing,” answered Alfred. And the walk was finished in silence ; but when the latter gentleman reached his comfortable dressing-room at the Old Ship, he lingered for a few moments by the fire, which blazed in the grate by Alfred’s orders (he hated cold, and the nights were apt to be chilly in that fresh wind-blown town), and thought of the woman he had just left. “ She shall be mine,” he said ; and then he continued his toilette, and parted his dark crisp hair in a rippled line down the middle of his head. “ Am I handsome ?” he asked himself, as he saw the reflection of that pale, dark-looking face in the mirror. Already Sophy’s influence was sufficient to make him feel a doubt where his vanity had never before admitted of one. He could not answer that question quite satisfactorily,

but he did not doubt his ultimate success with this beautiful woman. The wealthy Mr. Cadogan had had occasion once or twice to recall his father's cynical axiom, "that every woman was to be won;" and he was fully imbued with the truth of the doctrine. Whether he would succeed on an occasion like this, where money could hardly be offered or accepted as an inducement to temptation, remained to be seen.

They passed a pleasant evening, Mr. Herbert and his guests. Mrs. Herbert sat at the head of her table, looking even handsomer, Mr. Cadogan thought, than when he first saw her. Every glance from her velvety eyes, every rise and fall of the black lace that was flung over the creamy whiteness of her bust and shoulders added to his infatuation.

"Oh!" he said to himself, with a sort of groan, "how I could love that woman!" Then he exerted himself to talk, fearing that his admiration for his hostess was

becoming too evident; and in that effort he quite won the heart of his host, who was delighted with the great amount of information his guest displayed on almost every subject of interest. It was impossible that a man who had travelled and seen so much of the world as had Alfred Cadogan should fail to be very entertaining when he chose so to be. He could tell of bargains made with the wary Tartar tribes that take six days to complete, so cautious and slow of dealing are the northern savages; of sharp transactions done on the French Bourse in times of war. Bearded Turks and sharp-faced Greeks, plausible Italians, and shrewd Frenchmen—he had anecdotes to give of all, and of the countries of each. In a few well-chosen sentences he could convey the scenes of his stories so completely to the eyes of his listeners that, as Mrs. Herbert said, she could see the long, low tracts of Eastern sand, and the hot film through which the

camels moved dark against the blue sky, as clearly as she could imagine the vineyards that rippled along the sides of the Tuscan hills that figured in his narratives.

Mrs. Herbert, woman-like, only thought of the scenery and the quaint costumes Cadogan's vivid word-painting brought before her, but Gerald Lisle and Mr. Herbert were more struck by the practical portion of some of Alfred's narrations.

"A sharp customer he must be," thought Gerald, looking a little askance at his new friend; "I wonder *why* he backed my bill?"

Mr. Herbert, delighted as he was by his guest's brilliant flow of conversation, was left with a little perplexed feeling in his mind, that somehow (he did not know how) it seemed as though some of Mr. Cadogan's clever transactions were a little on the "off-side" of honesty.

Still the evening, as I have said, was a remarkably pleasant one, and when dinner

was over it happened somehow, through the agency of Mrs. Herbert, that Gerald Lisle and her husband became entangled in conversation in the front drawing-room, then the hostess sank into an easy chair by the fire in the inner room, and while the flame flared up on her glowing face and snowy throat, she was receiving from Alfred Cadogan looks which Mr. Herbert would hardly have approved of had his eyes been able to penetrate through the red folds of the damask curtain that was wholly concealing Mrs. Herbert and partly Mr. Cadogan from view.

Mrs. Herbert sat and listened to the sighs breathed on her shoulder in a more softened mood than usual; she was thinking very much of Geoffry this evening; and there was something of sweetness in the fact that Geoffry's brother was so quickly feeling the thraldom which Geoffry himself never even seemed to understand the existence of. So she gave glances back

to those fiery ones of Alfred which nearly maddened him. She allowed him to babble broken words into her ear, conventional words it is true; but words agitated by a ring of passion in them. And when the clatter of cups in the next room warned her that their *tête-à-tête* would soon terminate, she made no sign of displeasure at the soft touch of a pair of lips which she suddenly felt descend on her shoulder. Perhaps she thought it best not to notice the insolence. At all events, she merely moved gently in her seat, and rose to go; but when she caught sight of the trembling line that hovered round Alfred's mouth, the almost convulsive look of passion that swept over his face—his face which seemed to have turned blue in that moment—she felt a little alarmed at the storm she had evoked, and began to doubt the wisdom of the resolution she had formed to play with this man until she had made him a malleable tool in her soft fingers. “When he

may be useful to me," she had murmured; but after catching sight of all the devilry she had roused in his face, she was a little scared.

"What if he masters me!" she thought; but she laughed off the feeling of weakness ere Mr. Cadogan left the house. "What man ever could cope with me?" she reasoned proudly. Clever as Mrs. Herbert was, she little knew what would be the strength of the Frankenstein she was about to create, nor had she ever yet met a man so fit to overmaster her by passion, determination, and deceit, as was her new acquaintance.

CHAPTER II.

"And one, an English home, grey twilight pour'd
On dewy pastures, dewy trees,
Softer than sleep, all things in order stored,
A haunt of ancient peace."

TENNYSON.

THE summer days at Lynncourt always seemed to be of quite a different order from those passed elsewhere. There appeared to be a species of glamour over the place, partly engendered by the rich, moist air that steamed up from the marshes, and held and condensed in its weight all the luscious scents that exhaled from fruit and flower.

The wind rarely seemed to have any freshness in it. Even when it blew up from the river it was seldom strong enough

to do more than just stir the creamy blossoms on the lime-boughs. To those who understood the laws and proportions of architecture, the house itself was rather a rambling, irrational sort of building. The manor of Lynncourt had existed since the days when Thomas de Lynncourt had gone to fight by Richard Cœur de Lion's side in the Holy Land. He was away ten years, and perhaps it was more a circumstance to be deplored than wondered at, that he found on his return that his Lady de Lynncourt had grown tired of waiting for him, and had married again—a neighbouring baron. Thomas de Lynncourt took that course which, if adopted by modern husbands, would save the divorce court a world of trouble—he cut off the heads of both wife and lover, married again, and (untaught by experience) joined the next Crusade.

The only relic that survived at Lynncourt of this grim warrior's presence, was an old, lightning-blasted oak, to this day

called “Lord Lynncourt’s Oak,” which he was said to have planted.

Peace be to him! His dust has, hundreds of years since, been incorporated with the sands of Palestine ; but his monument exists in the Lynncourt Chapel, and he lies there in a perpetual state of prayer, his hand clasped, and the tip of his marble nose turned upward in supplication.

If all that is reported of his wild life be true, he cannot pray too long or too fervently.

The manor of Lynncourt passed through strange changes in the years that followed its founder’s death. One successor would be a wasteful reprobate, and let the whole place tumble down into ruinous disorder ; another would rebuild, and improve, and spend his fortune in repairing the evil work of his forefather. It was like the German story of the nose which lengthened or contracted, according to the different bites its owner took of apple or pear.

Between friend and foe, poor old Lynncourt came down to the present generation in rather a patched, and, as I have said, a rambling condition. One side of it (the oldest surviving portion of the house) had been built in the Tudor style by an unfortunate young lord of the manor, who had been mixed up in an affray with the keepers of one of the royal parks, and was accordingly hanged by his Majesty King Henry the Eighth, who had cast a covetous eye on the fair lands of Lynncourt, and who accordingly appropriated them on the owner's death.* The portrait of this ill-starred nobleman, painted by Holbein, hangs in one of the oak panels of the Lynncourt dining-room. He wears a melancholy expression of countenance, as though anticipating his fate, and his rather weak-looking blue eyes have a wistful gaze

* Thomas Ffynes, Lord Dacre, a lineal ancestor of the present Sir Thomas Barrett Lennard, Bart., suffered in the manner and for the cause above described.

in them, as though to invite compassion from the future generations that might stare at him long after his poor neck was wrung and his fate forgotten.

His widow recovered the estates and title for her son by a well-timed petition to the Queen (Elizabeth).

She is depicted in a very carefully painted portrait by Lucas de Heere. Her black satin sleeves, the lace on her stiff collar, her fingers, her ring, all the adjuncts around her, are depicted with extraordinary skill and minuteness. This lady's son's son held the estate with credit and profit to himself and neither was the building suffered to decay, nor did the blue blood of the Lynn courts become tainted by *mésalliance*, until the corruption of Charles the Second's court spread through the land, and the then Lord Renshawe (he had tacked that name on to the noble one of Lynncourt in consideration of some property that had been left with it), not only ruined himself at faro, but

espoused a natural daughter of the king, born to the monarch by that splendid beauty and abandoned courtesan, Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland.

If her immoral Grace did nothing else for the family of Renshawe, she imparted some of her beauty to it. Her heavy-lidded, lovely grey eyes came out afterwards in many of her descendants, though, if truth be told, the long upper lip of Charles Stuart generally appeared to neutralise the effect. By her father's death the little granddaughter of the duchess became sole heiress of these great estates, now somewhat damaged by Lord Renshawe's gaming propensities. This lady inherited a good deal of her grandmother's beauty, only it was of a less imperious description than is generally ascribed to King Charles's lovely mistress. She married and died young, and it was her only son who was Lord Renshawe, the father of the old countess.

The present Lady Renshawe was apt to

speak somewhat scornfully of her ancestral honours. Her father, the late earl, had been rather proud of his left-handed connection with royalty. King Charles's little daughter had brought with her a patent entitling her to quarter royal arms with those of Renshawe. She had also imported to Lynncourt two very lovely portraits, by Lely, of her mother, some equally good ones of her royal father, and a soft, brown curl of King Charles the First's hair, clasped by a little gold crown, and resting in a red velvet case.

Little Esty Lisle, when a child, used to regard it as a great privilege when she was allowed to unlock the glass case where the curl was preserved, and to pass her tiny fingers over its silky threads.

"It is like a woman's hair, so soft! Oh aunt, are you not proud of possessing such a relic of the royal martyr!"

"Royal fiddlestick!" her aunt would say prosaically. "He wasn't half such a martyr."

child, as that other poor ancestor of mine who was hanged because a king wanted his lands. I suppose Charles the Second thought that as an ancestor of his had taken a life from our family he was bound to pay us back our pound of flesh by giving us his daughter. A nice lot those women were!" added the countess, looking up grimly at the portraits of her fair but frail ancestors, for scandal had ascribed to Barbara Villiers' daughter some of the vices that disgraced Barbara Villiers herself.

"Why, aunt," said Esty, looking lovingly at the beautiful grey eyes and heavy downcast lids of the duchess, "I'm sure that lady looks as if——"

"As if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth," interrupted her aunt, sharply; "but it would, though; and don't let us talk about her any more, my dear. I'll tell you about the good Dorcas, if you like."

But the history of the "good Dorcas,"

who was a virtuous lady of the House of Lynncourt, and who, indeed, could have had little time for dissipation of any kind, judging by the immense quantity of tapestry which covered the walls, all said to be the work of her diligent hands, did not interest Esty nearly so much as this dark-eyed, dreamy-faced beauty, with dishevelled hair falling round her oval face, and a necklace of pearls clasping her round throat.

Her Grace of Cleveland seemed to have been attached to this string of pearls. They adorned her fair neck in no less than three different portraits that hung on the Lynncourt walls. Esty often wondered what had become of those pearls. Who knows? —even now they might be lying in some faint-scented drawer secreted in some lurking place in one of those old oak cabinets.

It was autumn at Lynncourt. Faint perfumes came from sandal-wood cabinets, and the pot-pourri vases full of dead rose-leaves that stood by the open doors. Old-fashioned

scents they were, breathing of decay ; and it was quite a relief to Esty to be greeted by the fresher odour of the flowers she had placed in the china jars, as she passed from room to room.

These untenanted rooms, with their polished oak floors, and their deep window-recesses, had great charms for Esty. She liked to see the sunbeams striking through the coloured panes and throwing quaint hues of red, blue, and yellow, on the gleaming edges of the picture-frames, on the carved backs of the oak chairs, and on the curious flowers traced in faded patterns on the tapestry cushions : the delicate rims of the little china cups caught strange radiance from these variegated hues, and even the damask roses in them became tinted with a misty glory of blue and purple. Outside all looked equally old-fashioned and peaceful : the once deep red of the walls had been toned down by the grey hues of age, and softened by the blurred edges of lichen ;

there was no footstep to sound on the broad gravel walks, the Lynncourt gardeners had always done the greater part of their work by eight in the morning; and when Lady Renshawe and Esty took their evening walk, they seldom heard anything but the tinkling of the sheep bells as the flocks strayed over the broad pastures, or the tapping of the deers' feet as they trotted now in slow lines, now with a rush and a gallop across the paths that intersected the grass.

It was evening, and Lady Renshawe had drawn her morocco chair to the window, that she might more easily see whereabouts to draw up the loops of red wool she held on her knitting pins. A bird was trilling outside, and pleasant scents from the heliotrope and mignonette beds came through the open windows, but the old countess's senses were becoming rather dulled; she could not hear the bird, and she drew her woollen shawl over her

shoulders at every faint gust of the flower scented air.

She worked quickly for some time, and then when a darker shade came over the landscape, she missed a stitch, the work got entangled, other stitches became complicated, and with an impatient jerk her fingers unravelled the whole of her previous labour. The countess laid down her knitting pins with a tear of helpless irritation in her eye.

“Is it come to this!” she thought, sadly. “Has proud, self-contained Annabella Renshawe lived to see her fine intellect and masculine powers dwindle down into second childhood !”

She looked out on her broad territories, the meadows over which the dying rays of the sun were streaming, the flocks of sheep that bleated to each other under the golden chestnuts, the deer that had stolen up to the house, and were gazing at her with alert ears and startled eyes.

"I cannot take these with me," she thought, discontentedly. "And yet I don't like leaving them behind. Helpless and old," she continued, looking sadly at her wrinkled hands. "Grey hairs and feeble fingers, and the hours roll on as blithely as when I used to watch them with bright eyes and a joyful heart; even my legs refuse to do their office without the assistance of this wooden prop," touching her gold-headed cane. "This stick will outlast Annabella Renshawe—this piece of oak which can neither reason, think, nor feel, is so far superior to my sentient self that it will endure when I am a handful of white dust! They'll put you away in an attic, and you'll live a dull life among spiders and cobwebs after stumping about with me so long, poor old thing!" she said, apostrophizing her stick, and then her meditations were broken in upon; for a bright face peeped in at the window, and Esty's fresh, sweet-toned voice asked—
"Aunt, are you coming to walk to-night?"

The countess, glad of the diversion to her thoughts, said, "Yes, she thought she would;" and she put on her walking things and stumped down the marble steps with an activity which proved that she had somewhat over-estimated her infirmities.

"Esty," she said, passing her shoe over the edge of the velvety lawn. "This has not been properly mown this morning! remind me to speak about it to-morrow."

The countess had recovered her spirits with the exertion of exercise, and she needed the assistance of her walking-stick less than usual to-night, as she passed from her flower-beds to the conservatory, from conservatory to orchard, finding fault with various arrangements with as much liveliness and asperity as if she numbered only forty instead of seventy summers.

"Lord bless her!" said her old coachman, admiringly, as he watched her quick movements, and listened to the vehemence of her reproof to some hapless fellow-servant.

"What a spairy old 'oss it is! She'll die in harness, she will; when she do drop down, 'twill be on the road."

When the countess had finished her tour of inspection, she settled herself at one of her favourite rose-beds, where her black satin bonnet, rounded in shape, and shiny in texture, looked somewhat like a huge black-beetle hovering above the damask beauties. Esty was commissioned to pluck off the dead blossoms of the scarlet geraniums that were planted in the vases on the terrace, and armed with a pair of garden scissors and a wicker basket, that young lady betook herself to the task.

CHAPTER III.

"She had a nosegay in her bosom, but a look so pure and fresh-coloured you'd have taken her for one of the seasons."—*The Accomplish'd Fools.*

"Ipse Amor, puer Dionæ, rure natus dicitur."

THE dying sunbeams that slanted across the grey stonework of the balustrade cast pleasant golden glimmers on Esty's brown hair, as she stood, with uncovered head, near the geraniums, her little hands moving busily among the scarlet blossoms, the petals of which fell in profusion over the light folds of her blue muslin dress. When she had snipped off the last withered stalk she looked round to see what had become of her aunt, but the countess was out of sight, so the girl, dropping her scissors idly into the basket, rested her arms on the balustrade and looked out into as much

of the future as that boundary of distant blue hills would permit to her imagination.

"She would like to have wings," she thought, "and fly away over those hills."

Then she wondered what kind of a place the swallows found the world beyond those hills to be, whether they ever got chilled and wearied in their flight over the seas, and wished themselves back in the withered nests that hung under the eaves.

"I wish something would happen!" she murmured. "Nothing ever *does* happen here; always the same routine, the same stillness! It would be something if one lived in a farm-house, and could hear dogs bark and hens cluck. That would be life—life that gives and receives interest; but here all is as dead, silent, beautiful, and indifferent as death;" and she looked a little weariedly at the blue hills, the indistinct ridges of which were becoming irksome to her. She looked and dreamed until the dying sun, the shadows that lay on the paths,

the cawing of the distant rooks, became mixed up in a host of fancies, which at last resolved themselves into a sort of vague romance of which she was the heroine, associated with some indefinite hero—a hero who was as yet scarcely more than an idea. She had not even imagined the colour of his eyes ; he was as shadowy as the scenes she pictured of those foreign lands where she was to meet him.

Visions of orange groves, rich-scented flowers, hot suns, blue seas, and shadowed coves passed before her thought-enrapt eyes, and in one of these bays her boat should be moored, while she sat by *his* side, listening first to the soft drip of the water as it ran down the rugged channels of the sea-washed rock, and then to the deep, low tones of his voice as he read aloud to her.

“What should he read to her?” The visioned picture became broken up by the disturbance this query raised in her mind.

She thought of “O’Connor’s Child,” but

that was not appropriate ; "Gertrude of Wyoming," "Parisina," "The Corsair." She declined them all, and at last decided on—

" We two will rise, and sit, and walk together
Under the roof of blue Ionian weather,
And wander in the meadows, or ascend
The mossy mountains, where the blue heavens bend
With lightest winds to touch their paramour ;
Or linger where the pebble-paven shore,
Under the faint quick kisses of the sea,
Trembles and sparkles as with ecstacy ;—
Possessing and possest by all that is
Within that calm circumference of bliss,
And by each other, till to love and live
Be one."

" Till to love and live be one," repeated Esty, softly, her voice taking the intonation of tenderness suitable to the imagined occasion.

While the unconscious Esty was enacting her little drama—scenery, words, and characters all supplied by her own vivid imagination—while she sought to evoke from the dreams of the future the image of her "fate," Fate stood nearer to her than she had any conception of, and

Fate, in the shape of a handsome young man, who carried a carpet-bag in one hand and a great-coat over his arm, said, half audibly :

“ By Jove ! what a pretty girl !”

“ We two will rise, and sit, and walk together
Under the roof of blue Ionian weather,”

reiterated Esty, softly.

“ Ahem ! I have the honour of speaking to——” Captain Adair began in a low voice, but if he had fired a cannon off in Miss Lisle’s ears he could hardly have startled her more. She turned round abruptly at the sound that had broken in upon her reverie, and the reality before her completely scattered away the whole “baseless fabric of her visions.” She blushed vividly a quick, hot blush, that flew from forehead to throat, and then faded, leaving her as pale as the urn against which she leaned.

“ How very genuine she is !” thought Geoffry, and then, taking off his hat, he apologised for his abrupt arrival.

"I fear I startled you," he said. "I suppose you could not hear me come across the grass?"

"N—no," stammered Esty. Then, recovering her composure a little, she said, "But what—but who——?"

"My name is Adair," he said, anticipating her question. "I am the son of an old friend of Lady Renshawe, and I was taught at a very early age to believe that I should not be otherwise than a welcome guest here; but the difficulty is, you see, that I should not know Lady Renshawe if I saw her. I might make some dreadful mistake. You are not the countess, are you?" he said, with a smile, which put Esty more at her ease than the whole of his explanation.

"No," said Esty, answering his smile. "I am Miss Lisle. There is my aunt, coming there."

She indicated with her hand a vista of the shrubbery, through which a glimpse

could be obtained of Lady Renshawe's bonnet.

Captain Adair lingered a moment, as if he expected the young lady would accompany him up to her aunt, but, finding that she had returned to her occupation of cutting off stalks (or, rather, was pretending to do so, for in her confusion she decapitated blooming and withered blossoms indiscriminately), he bowed, and stepped quickly across the grass to meet the countess.

There was still sun enough to throw bright lights on his fair, close-cropped curls and gold-hued moustache, and, with his small head, broad chest, and lithe, easy gait, he looked a perfect embodiment of Saxon beauty. Lady Renshawe's wonder was not unmixed with admiration as she fixed her spectacles on her nose, and stared hard at her unexpected visitor.

Meanwhile, Esty had caught up her basket, and, without venturing to look round at the meeting of her aunt and

the stranger, sped away with the swiftness of a lapwing to the house. She retreated to her little room, and sat down on the window-seat, her face crimsoning when she thought how childish and how *gauche* she must have appeared to Captain Adair. So this was Captain Adair, was it? —the grown-up original of the little miniature that hung in the breakfast-room. On the whole, Esty thought she was disappointed. He was not at all what she had expected he would be. She had fashioned a bright-eyed, hectic-looking youth out of that delicate baby-face of the portrait, and lo! here was a young Hercules, whose broad chest left no possible opening for consumption.

“I suppose he will stay here to-night. I wonder if aunt will ask him. Of course she will, though. I wonder what Christine will say!” and then Esty went to the glass and looked at herself. “Oh, dear! how ugly I’m looking!” she said, discontentedly,

and she seized a brush and swept the long floats of her hair, until it shone in its waves like brown silk. Then she twisted it up in a glossy coil at the back of her head, and began to seek for some further adornment to her person. To her dress she could do nothing ; it was a plain blue muslin, and nothing could have been more suitable to wear on that sultry autumn evening, to say nothing of its being eminently becoming to her graceful, pliant figure ; but, in its simplicity and plainness, poor Esty felt it to be quite unworthy of the gorgeous apparition she had encountered on the lawn. However, she stuck a red rose in the waistband of her little black silk apron, and thought, after all, "she didn't look so bad." Perhaps "he would not notice either her or her dress." Then she walked slowly down the great stairs. She paused on the way longer than usual, feeling, for the first time, that the oak-griffins that flung such long shadows down

the corner steps were protections not to be wantonly deserted. She was shy and nervous, and it was a relief to meet Lady Renshawe suddenly face to face.

The old countess's face wore a softened expression; a smile agitated the wrinkles round her mouth, and her eyes had a light in them which made Esty look at them with wonder.

"I have been much pleased, my dear!" the elder lady said. "The son of a very dear old friend has come to see me, and in his kind eyes and cordial voice I seem to have called back a taste of youth to my dried-up old heart. I seem to have reached out my hand to that of Geoffry Adair's dear dead mother once again. I have seen her glance in his—heard her voice, with the same inflexions that graced it when she and I were young, my dear—young, aye, and beautiful too, though 'Wha would think it to see me now?' as the 'Auld Wife' sang!" Even as Lady Renshawe

spoke the light of animation faded from her withered face, and a look of fatigue usurped its place. "I'm tired," she said, wearily, "I think I'll go and lie down for a while. Go and make yourself agreeable to my friend, Esty. But, my dear," she added, with a spice of her old malice, "if you keep your head stuck on one side in that fashion, you'll look like one of those wooden dolls that has a string running up from its heels to its head, and whose head hangs over when the string isn't pulled;" with this Parthian shaft the old lady hobbled up-stairs, while her grand-niece descended to the breakfast-room, where she found Captain Adair swinging a flower in his hand, and looking out rather wistfully at the blue mists that were beginning to rise from the valley.

Lady Renshawe not only gave her guest a cordial invitation to stay that night at Lynn-court, but she begged him to extend his visit over as many days and nights as possible.

"The only quarrel I have with you," she said, "is, that you should have been in England so long without coming to see me before."

Geoffry explained how near he had been to coming to X—shire, on Gerald's invitation.

"'Near' isn't 'quite,'" the old lady said, snappishly; "besides, your mother's son need scarcely have waited for an invitation to my house. However," she continued, graciously, "now you are here, it must be my business to prove to you how welcome your presence is; and the first thing I beg of you is, that you will not withdraw it sooner than you can help. I am such an old woman, and Esty is such a chit," she continued, "that I fear you will be very dull here; but you must make yourself quite at home, and that will compensate for many deficiencies."

Geoffry smiled, as his eyes met those of the niece, and he assured the aunt

that he should not be in the least dull : he was certain of that. He walked over with Esty to make the acquaintance of her family, and he was introduced to Colonel and Mrs. Lisle, Christine, and Toby. The colonel put on his grandest company air to receive the young man.

“ I knew your father, sir,” he said, “ a most gallant and distinguished officer. What is your regiment ? The —— Guards, you say ! That is not the kind of regiment in which I should have expected to find your father’s son.”

This was rather spiteful of the colonel, but then he was feeling spiteful on this particular day, for he had found a button off his shirt that morning, and had been compelled to fasten his collar with a pin, and every man knows what an irritating, scratchy sensation at one’s throat such a proceeding entails.

“ You are quite right, Colonel Lisle,” the young man answered good-humouredly.

“ It is not the regiment for a man desirous of being something better than a carpet knight, and I’ve got so sick of it that I have during this last month arranged an exchange to the —— Lancers. They are likely to be under orders for India or China at any moment, and although I don’t imagine the barbarians will give us any brilliant opportunity of distinguishing ourselves, yet it will be something to have a chance.”

“ Young men’s chances of that sort are not what they were in my day,” said the colonel; “ any profession now brings more honour than a soldier’s.”

“ Do not say that,” Captain Adair answered, his blue eyes flashing. “ I would not change my profession for any in the world ; it is true that war rarely blows its hot breath our way, now-a-days, but whenever it does so, think what a privilege it is to be among those who have to face it ! Supposing that a European war broke out

now, who would change places with a lawyer, poring over dusty books in city chambers, or the clergyman, treading down daisies in country lanes, when there's telegram after telegram pouring in news of hard-fought battles, or dearly-won victories? Fancy being contented to read in men's faces, to hear from men's mouths, rumour of cannons roaring and comrades dying, when one could be in the thick of the smoke oneself! You, sir, I am sure, could never sleep at home in peace under such circumstances; you'd fancy you heard the word of command in every branch that beat against your window-pane; you'd be startled by sounds of artillery in every gust of wind that woke you from your slumbers; at last, able to bear it no longer, you would hasten to London and beg the commander-in-chief to let you air your old uniform in an element congenial to a garment that became blood-spotted, torn, and dun-coloured in the dust our men made in

that desperate defence of the Chateau of Hougmont, on the 18th of June, 1815;" and the young man raised his hat to the veteran whose gallantry had been conspicuous on that memorable occasion.

"By God, I would, sir!" replied Colonel Lisle, his eyes glistening with excitement; "and you talk like a gentleman and a soldier, Captain Adair, and, by Jove! you're very different from that puppy of mine, Gerald, not but what his heart's in the right place, and if he were placed in the front of the enemy I feel sure he would walk up to them as coolly as if they were a room full of pretty women; but he 'haw-haws' and 'yaw-yaws' as if it were a duty : he owes his caste to repress all natural and manly emotion; as if a pretty woman or a gallant enemy weren't objects to make any gentleman's eye grow bright and heart beat high. I wouldn't give *that*," continued Colonel Lisle, with an energetic snap of his fingers, "for such cold-blooded affectation!"

"I believe that I am rather too voluble," Geoffry said, smiling; "but I must claim my excuse in the fact that my father taught me when I was a boy to feel very enthusiastic about his profession: I think, too, he allowed me to talk too much, and there's no language like the Italian for running one's tongue into unreasonable fluency."

"Don't be ashamed of your enthusiasm, it's uncommonly refreshing," Colonel Lisle said, kindly, and then, encouraged by the interest his visitor took in that (which, it was the old man's opinion, the world had too easily forgotten), namely, the glory which attended the Iron Duke's last and greatest battle, he entered into many details which, though familiar to his family, were new and interesting to Captain Adair. He told him how he and General Adair were side by side when the English line was ordered to advance and attack the reserve battalions of the Imperial Guard.

"I shall never forget that moment,"

Colonel Lisle said ; “ never forget the grim desperate faces of those grand old savages who met us. They had been ordered there to die. They knew that. It was their business to stand and be cut down to favour the retreat of those shattered remnants that fled behind them. Their foreheads were scarred and wrinkled as withered leaves, and many of them had hair as white as mine is now. They fought hard for the eagles, which in twenty years’ warfare had never been wrenched from their hands. They fought like rats at bay, sir, and as the ground got heaped with their bodies, the rest formed closer, and fought harder, but our superior numbers soaked them down, and mixed with the death-sobs that came from under our feet, came also, in disjointed phrases, the motto of their regiment, ‘ We die, but we surrender not,’ as fine an amen as a soldier could breathe his way out of this world with, I call it !” And the old man took snuff hastily.

"I remember," he added, "there were some rather good lines written by Danson of ours, about the charge of the French cuirassiers—poor fellow, he died young!" and the colonel looked sentimental. *?Danson*

"From the effect of his wounds, papa?" asked Christine.

"No, my dear, from delirium tremens; but the lines are good ones for all that;" and going to an escritoire on which stood his battered despatch-box, Colonel Lisle extracted from its interior some faded yellow scraps of paper, and in a voice, now sonorous, now quavering (for the voice of age, like that of youth, is uncertain and wayward in its modulation), he read as follows:

"'CHARGE OF THE FRENCH CUIRASSIERS:

"'JUNE 18, 1815.

"'When we trampled the vineyards round Hougoumont's walls,
Through the smoke and the blaze of that turbulent hour,
Our heads held erect midst the whirr of their balls,
Till we fell like ripe fruit that is swept by a shower.

"'When their cuirassiers charged us, twelve thousand in mass,
With the furious speed of a cataract's flow,
We met them in square, not a horseman could pass
The bright line that bristled to welcome the foe.

- “‘ They had scattered our cavalry, swept through the play
 Of the cannon that roared its full charge at their breast ;
 With haughty defiance they kept on their way
 Till the points of our bayonets held them in rest.
- “‘ Then they wheeled and re-formed, and they galloped again
 On the spear-points that never had faltered a jot,
 Till riderless horses rushed back through the slain,
 And many bold spirits that had been, were not !
- “‘ With their line rent and torn, yet once more they re-formed,
 With their forces condensed to give weight to the shock,
 Swept by our first line through the cross-fire that stormed,
 To the second, who met the wild charge like a rock.
- “‘ One body of horsemen, in mocking despair,
 With a “Vive l’Empereur !” met the Englishmen’s cheer ;
 Trotted up at a foot’s pace—then cut in the air,
 And slowly returned through hot fire to the rear.
- “‘ We were worthy their swords—they as worthy did prove :
 Peace be to the fallen ! whether foeman or friend,
 For next to the grasp of a friend, what I love
 Is the grasp of a foe who is staunch to the end.’ ”

There was a pause for some moments after the colonel had rolled out the last line in a voice that would have been solemn had it not also been rather choked. Christine’s eyes glistened ; while Esty, glancing askance at Captain Adair, pictured to herself how grand *he* would look charging with his troop ; then she thought of the fair head bowed by some deadly stroke from its place

in the line, and shuddered. Colonel Lisle walked up to the window, and looked out without seeing the roses that grew against the pane, or the clematis that overshadowed it; the old-fashioned room filled with the quiet atmosphere of home—the sunshine, his daughters' faces, all had faded before the stirring images the conversation had evoked: his eyes were blinded with smoke, his ears filled with the din of battle—he felt himself once more carried onwards in a line, where friends dropped away and were succeeded by others with startling rapidity—he remembered the thrill that went through him as he waited for the shock of those thundering hoof-treads; the flash of a Frenchman's sabre, who nearly swept over his bayonet's-point; the crash and the thud as a man and horse fell, doubled up in mortal agony before him—the wild struggles of the charger—the dull insensibility of the rider, who lay there equally unconscious of the trampling feet

and the additional thrust given by the next bayonet, to "make all sure." Colonel Lisle was a tender-hearted ensign then, and he remembered that he could not help wishing, when he saw the rest of the troop gallop back, that *his* man could rise and go with the rest.

The old man was recalled from his meditations by Captain Adair's walking up to him.

"Thank you, colonel, for reading those lines," the latter said. "I seemed to see the men that charged and the line that received them 'like a rock,' as you say; that mighty rush of cavalry had no more success in unsteadyng our squares than had the poor Mamelukes when they charged the French line in Egypt."

Then the young soldier and the old one plunged into an eager disquisition as to the comparative merits of French and English cavalry; and Esty, pleased to see her father so well disposed towards the new

acquaintance, for whom she felt in some degree responsible, retired with Christine.

“Don’t you think he’s very nice, Chrissy?” she asked, shyly, as she and her sister walked round the ragged flower-beds, and Christine answered “Yes, very!” adding emphatically :

“He’s not a bit like Gerald!”

CHAPTER IV.

"Love's sooner felt than seen, his substance thin
Betwixt those snowy mounts in ambush lies;
He therefore soonest wins that fastest flies:
Fly thence, my dear, fly fast my Thomaline;
Who him encounters once, for ever dies.
But if he lurks between the ruddy lips,
Unhappy soul that thence his nectar sips,
While down into his heart the sugar'd poison slips.

* * * * *

Oft in a voice he creeps down through the ear,
Oft from a blushing cheek he lights his fire,
Oft shrouds his golden flame in likest hair,
Oft in a soft, smooth skin doth close retire,
Oft in a smile—oft in a silent tear."

P. FLETCHER.

IT is extraordinary how different everything at Lynncourt looked in Esty's eyes after Captain Adair had prolonged his stay there a few weeks. The figures that waved on the tapestry, the Mandarins that nodded their heads in shadowy corners of the oak-chambers, the very books that stood in pon-

derous rows on the shelves, seemed to lose their sense of old acquaintanceship and to assume an air of novelty in the glamour his presence shed over them. She quite neglected all her old friends now; the ghost in the "Old English Baron" might clank his bones all night along the "windy corridors"—his footstep had ceased to echo in Esty's ear as she lay awake listening to the snatch of a song or a careless whistle that was wont to attend Geoffry's progress when his light step passed along the passage that led to his room. Harriet Byron might have as many hair-breadth escapes of abduction, and glorify herself in tedious epistles to her friends, as much as she liked—Esty no longer felt any sympathy with her; nor did she give one thought to the distresses of that virtuous maiden, Pamela, who endured so much and who loved so little! Heroes and heroines, evil magicians and good fairies, kings, warriors, and poets—all the ideal shapes that had tenanted

the unoccupied chambers of her mind for the last ten years, were ruthlessly swept away, to give place to the image of one pair of shining blue eyes and a head of crisp yellow curls.

It was as though all the beautiful shapes and glittering intricacies in an ice cavern were suddenly exposed to the rays of the sun, and real flowers had sprung up in the place of scentless phantasms of ice and snow.

True, Esty would voluntarily spend hours away from Geoffry's society. If she heard his step coming to the chamber where she sat, she would remove herself to a more distant one, and search with apparent interest for some book or paper, of which she tried to persuade herself she was in want; or she would sit down with her work in the recess of some old window and listen vaguely to the bubble of the fountain in the garden, or the soft wail of the *Æolian harp*, which was always placed in the corridor-

window in fine weather ; then she wondered whether Geoffry would be likely to pass by the window, and her heart beat high and her cheek flushed as she saw by the shadow thrown on the gravel path, that he *was* coming ; and then she applied herself to her work with such reckless industry that she generally ended by snipping off the head of the silken flower she was embroidering for Lady Renshawe's sofa pillow.

It was a golden age for them both—both so young and so happy—both so inexperienced that their hearts did not even dream of foreshadowing evil or prophesying sorrow : their lips only breathed one thought—one doubt.

Hers was : “Does he care for me ?”

His : “Does she love me ?”

And if neither of them had hitherto put that thought into actual sound, it was more owing to the instinctive modesty that clings to a first true passion, than from any real doubt each felt of the other's answer.

"Do you ride, Miss Lisle?" Geoffry asked, shortly after his arrival at Lynncourt. Esty's face lighted up as she remembered her youthful exploits on the Shetland pony, and she said "that she used to ride as a child, but she had now no opportunity of doing so."

"But should you like to ride?" persisted Geoffry, and Miss Lisle's eyes sparkled as she admitted she should like it extremely; but "there are a good many things I should like," she added, philosophically, "which I shan't get."

"Such as what?"

"Oh, I should like to have a great deal of money."

"And what would you do with it?"

"I should go to W——" (the county town) "and buy mamma a fresh set of oil paints; and Christine a beautiful work-box, fitted up with satin, you know, and everything; and I'd buy papa a large case of the very best cigars; and Dolly a cap; and,

oh! don't let's talk about it any more!" and Esty came to a sudden check, feeling rather ashamed of her enthusiasm.

"What would you get for yourself?" asked Captain Adair, his blue eyes shining down ineffable love on the little face beside him.

"Oh! I don't know," she said, indifferently; "I don't think I want anything of that sort. I sometimes fancy that if it wasn't for leaving aunt, and mamma, and Chrissy, I should like to travel very much."

"And where would you go?" said Geoffry, secretly determining that every wish she had hitherto expressed should be fulfilled, and, with a faint hope in his heart (a hope so sweet that for an instant it made his cheek flush and his voice tremble) that he might one day accomplish even this last-named aspiration.

"I am not quite sure where I should like to go first," she said, dreamily; "I have sat

on the big staircase, studying the map for hours, fancying myself wandering over different parts of the globe ; but I think I long most to see Italy ; " then she plied Geoffry with question after question about the towns, cities, and scenery he had lately revisited. " Have you really seen Keats' grave ? " she asked, solemnly. Captain Adair smiled at her eagerness, as he answered " Yes," he had stood by Keats' grave a month since ; " it looked ragged and desolate compared to the cool, shadowed corner where Shelley's heart rested in a bed of violets in the inner cemetery. Keats' grave was in the outer cemetery, and it was overrun with wild weeds and grasses, there was not the same cool glooms from cypress trees, and fragrance from the roses, as there was on the other side of the grounds."

Then Geoffry produced his sketch-book, and Esty was charmed into expression of delight at the little vivid bits of colour-

ing and the boldness of touch with which he had represented some of his favourite nooks and corners. Here was the green framework of a Venetian window,—a window ensconced in fretted marble-work, and overlooking dim waters; and out of the window leant a boy in his shirt-sleeves, with a laugh in his elfish-looking black eyes, and a red cap on his head. “‘A sketch in Venice,’ ” said Geoffry. But when Esty asked him to describe Venice he shook his head.

“I cannot,” he answered, “it is inde-scribable. Charles Dickens gives you the best idea, when he speaks of it as ‘a strange dream upon the water.’ The city resembles a beautiful woman in death—it oppresses you alike with a sense of magnificence and decay. The marble palaces that stretch away in tender-hued masses down the waters, the crowds that glide through wave-enclosed streets, no clamour attending their floating progress—nothing, at

least, but the dip of the oars and the ripple of the water; the bells that clang out from the churches when the rosy twilight has deepened into night; the lights of the city that then sparkle out in that dismal waste of skies and waters; all is dream-like, airy, and strange: you can never realise it, Miss Leslie, until you see it and feel it for yourself."

He showed her sketches of Roman ruins, with their once noble length of column buried in long grasses, where the pink tints of the monthly roses that clustered over them made a pleasant contrast to the cold grey hue of the broken bits of marble. Of fountains in old Roman gardens, that gushed out volumes of spray over the tangled margin of flowers and weeds that had clambered over their scarred sides, and dropped their ripe petals into the green depths beneath.

Then there was a bay of sleepy-looking blue sea, with a bit of garden wall leaning

over its narrow strip of beach, and the twisted branches of an olive tree, and the red edges of some carnations, in pots, peeped over the crumbled summit of the wall. "This was at St. Remo," Captain Adair said : he hoped that when Miss Lisle made that excursion into Italy she talked of, that she would travel on the Corniche road, and spend on that strip of beach, as he had done, some of the balmiest hours possible to imagine.

"Who is that?" asked Esty, suddenly cutting short Captain Adair's reminiscences of blue seas and purple hills, as her quick eye detected the portrait of a woman in the recesses of the portfolio.

Geoffry drew it out, and disclosed the rich brown eyes, abundant hair, and thick throat of Mrs. Herbert.

"Oh, that's Sophy," he said, carelessly. And then he told Esty all about his friendship with the Herberts, how kind they had been to him, how he had known them since

he was a boy ; and, above all, how he hoped that Miss Lisle would make their acquaintance when they came to stay at Castle Herbert, as he hoped and trusted they would do ere long.

Miss Lisle looked long and earnestly at the face depicted upon the piece of paper before her, and then she replaced it in the portfolio.

“The forehead is too low,” she observed, presently. Geoffry answered lightly, “Oh, was it ? he dare say it was ;” but the fact was, he had known Sophy so long, he never thought of observing her looks at all.

“A friend like her is not the same as a woman one loves,” he said, musingly. “Such a friend resembles the scenery of a beautiful familiar road. One passes it often, one is to a certain extent grateful for its sunshine and flowers ; above all, for the smoothness of its pathway, but it does not strike the imagination with the freshness

of novelty, and so, at last, one forgets to notice whether it be lovely or not."

Esty made no further allusion to Mrs. Herbert at the time; probably she was re-assured by the utter indifference of Captain Adair's voice when speaking of the possessor of those big brown eyes, but they came before her sometimes, in the grey hours, between night and dawn, ere her thoughts had settled into any definite channel, and filled her with a vague sense of uneasiness. Inexperienced as she was, instinct supplied her imagination with doubts as to what kind of attachment a woman so young and lovely as Mrs. Herbert was likely to feel for a man of Captain Adair's age and appearance.

Meanwhile the latter had been taking means to provide Esty with some of the treasures she had said she coveted. He ordered down a paint-box from London, a work-box lined with red satin, and some of the best cigars Bond Street could produce;

then came the consideration of the cap for Dolly—this rather puzzled the young man. After much deliberation he decided on sending for ten yards of the broadest and best ribbon that could be purchased.

“It must be dark-coloured,” he said; “it was to be made up into a lady’s cap.”

And the shopman at Swan and Edgar’s (not the handsome, amiable young creature who bows at the doors of that establishment, acting as a kind of decoy to persuade weak-minded ducks to enter those portals where “all hope is abandoned” by their pocket-suffering drakes, but another youth who serves behind the counter, and who received Captain Adair’s orders) wondered exceedingly as to what kind of a cap and what kind of a woman those ten yards of ribbon were going to adorn.

There was something else which Esty had not mentioned in her list of unattainable wishes which Geoffry ordered from London; but about this he resolved to say

nothing until circumstances should determine whether or not the gift would be welcome to the person for whom it was designed—namely, Esty herself.

He had also sent for his horses, and he established these in the village inn stables, preferring to run the chance of exposing valuable animals to the risk of strange company to trespassing further on Lady Renshawe's hospitality. But that venerable lady became most indignant when she heard of this arrangement.

"A pack of stuff and nonsense!" she said, energetically; "send for them directly, Geoffry" (she always called her guest by his Christian name now, and seemed to take pleasure in doing so); "my horses only occupy two stalls, and there are at least eight in my stables."

The young man accepted her hospitality gratefully; he much preferred having his horses within such distance that he could stroll in the first thing before breakfast,

and the last thing before dinner, to pass his hand over their legs, and judge how much or how little additional exercise the owners of them required.

Like all men much accustomed to horses, Geoffry was very careful over them, and he had frequently irritated Mrs. Herbert by the strenuous objections he raised against cantering on any road that had not a “bit of soft” by its side. During some riding party in which she would attempt by outriding the rest of her friends to secure him in a *tête-à-tête*, frequently Mrs. Herbert had feigned inability to hold in her horse, and, after galloping forward some yards, had looked back intensely disgusted at seeing Captain Adair a long way behind her, leisurely picking his way among the stones, and only lifting up his voice to remonstrate with her on her inhumanity.

“ You’re going as hard as if you were on the Downs, Sophy ; do remember that your horse’s legs are not made of cast-iron.”

And Sophy would turn with a vicious twitch of her bridle, and ride back sullenly, thinking that all the inhumanity was not on her side.

Captain Adair had no such rebellion to encounter from Esty ; her delight was unbounded when she found what was the purpose of his bringing his horses to Lynn-court, and she expressed so much pleasure to her aunt on the subject that the countess could not find it in her heart to object to what she secretly stigmatised as “dangerous tomfoolery. She was further mollified by the anxious inquiries her niece made as to *her* mode of riding in the days of her youth.

“I feel so stupid about it, aunt ; it is so long since I was on horseback,” Esty said.

Lady Renshawe gave her so many intricate directions, to keep her eyes always looking out between her horse’s ears, to sit upright—yet by no means to sit stiffly—to hold her horse well in hand, but on no ac-

count to give him his head, that her niece felt more bewildered than ever, and was quite relieved when her aunt finished the lecture and went to her clothes-press, in the drawers of which reposed the petticoat Esty was to assume for her ride.

The countess looked tenderly at the green faded skirt, which, guarded by camphor bags from moths, had lain undisturbed for the last eight and forty years.

“I shouldn’t wonder if it wanted a little airing,” she said, musingly, as she unfolded it; and then her thoughts strayed back to a certain ride she had taken with that child’s grandfather on the afternoon of the very day his attachment to Lady Clara had been discovered, not as yet by herself, but by her father.

Frederic Lisle’s manner had been unusually tender that day, either because he felt remorse towards, or covetous of, the prize he had *not* chosen; and so the elder sister breathed in a fool’s paradise until the even-

ing came, bringing with it news that turned her bright, imperious youth into hard-minded, cold, middle age.

"Habit-skirts were worn shorter in my day, my dear," the countess said, startled from her meditations by feeling Esty's fingers touch her shoulder, "and I don't think you can wear the top at all anywhere out of the park; but, I dare say, you won't wish to extend your rides farther than Lynncourt for a day or two. And, my dear, old John must go with you, you know; he can follow you on one of my horses; it wouldn't look well for you only to have that boy Geoffry with you!"

"The top" the countess had referred to was a jacket, such as might have been worn by Die Vernon, or any other amazon of her period; it was a green jacket, laid back over the breast in flappets, like a man's coat, and it was heavily trimmed with what was now tarnished silver lace.

When Esty entered the room habited

in this quaint, old-fashioned costume, her aunt started to see how much of grace and freshness still seemed to belong to the faded green-cloth, and its tawdry splendour; she pulled the comb from Esty's head, and let the long coils of hair unravel and tumble down in soft profusion over the girl's shoulder.

"Now, if you only had a hat and feather you would look just as I did eight and forty years ago," the countess said. Captain Adair, who entered the room during this observation, thought in his heart that, if what she said was correct, Lady Renshawe must have been a very lovely young lady—much more so than her present appearance seemed to indicate.

"You look such—" "a darling," it was on Geoffry's lips to say, when he lifted Esty on to her horse; but he checked himself, and tagged his sentence with—"such a quaint, old-fashioned little fairy;" but I think that in the break of his speech Esty

read the first epithet in his eyes, and rather preferred that silent mode of expressing his sentiments.

As soon as Lady Renshawe had provided her niece with a modern habit, the rides, which had at first been confined to circles round the house, became extended to the green lanes outside the estate ; and Geoffry declared that he had never met before with so apt a pupil as his present one. As far as her seat was concerned, Esty had nothing to learn ; she had had too much practice as a child, and was too naturally graceful not to fall involuntarily into her right place on her horse's back ; in every other respect she was docile and intelligent. Could Mrs. Herbert have guessed how much tenderness Captain Adair felt towards the creature whose accomplishment he was perfecting, and what pleasure he experienced in guiding Esty's ignorance into proficiency, I think Sophy would have cursed her own competency, and wish her hand had been

less expert in its management of a bridle when she first knew Geoffry.

The days had never appeared to pass so swiftly to the latter as now. It seemed pleasanter to him to wander with this girl in country lanes, to stain his fingers with dewberries in her service, and to gather handfuls of hedge-flowers and wild ferns for her pleasure, than to be on the top of a drag escorting gaudy actresses down to Richmond, whose conversation was as tawdry as the false bloom on their cheeks, or to be on a visit to some country-house where London fashion and London tone are imported into

“Verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.”

Those quiet dinners, where the two sat in the cool shadows of Lady Renshawe’s dining-room, and ate and drank out of old-fashioned chased silver and pure-looking goblets of cut glass—where the glowing sides of the peaches rested between layers

of green leaves and crystal lumps of ice, and where the epergne of flowers shed perfume over the whole table—was not all this far pleasanter than crowded dinner-parties, where the room feels stifling from the oppression of its numbers, and a ceaseless babble of conversation is considered necessary to keep up an appearance of enjoyment? Geoffry thought so, and he expressed his opinion to Lady Renshawe, who was short-sighted enough to appropriate to herself all the compliment of the enjoyment he evinced.

CHAPTER V.

“Oh, that joy so soon should waste,
Or so sweet a bliss—
As a kiss—
Might not for ever last:
So sugar’d, so melting, so soft, so delicious;
The dew that lies on roses,
When the morn herself discloses,
Is not so precious.”

BEN JONSON.

“WHERE is Mrs. Herbert now?” Esty asked Captain Adair one morning, and he flushed guiltily, and said, “By Jove! yes! What a brute I have been!”

“Why so?”

“Because I ought—I intended—to have written to her immediately I returned to England, and here I have been at home for nearly three weeks, and have never let them know it. I will write this very afternoon.”

When the afternoon came, Geoffry retreated to the library, and, sitting down before an escritoire, took up his pen, with the full intention of writing a full account to Sophy of all he had seen or done since the date of his last letter to her. Somehow his thoughts would not arrange themselves in proper order ; his memories of Rome and Naples had grown indistinct since he had passed those three last weeks at Lynncourt —and Lynncourt was a subject which as yet he did not care to discuss. He was feeling a sort of breathless happiness at the near approach of this new joy—this love, the consciousness of which was beginning to steal over his heart. He watched the progress of the novel but delicious sensation with the same kind of half hope, half fear with which a mariner might hail the first faint dawn of day in a foreign island on which he had been thrown over night by the waves.

“ My dear Mrs. Herbert,” Geoffry began,

fluently enough. Then he stroked with his pen a vase filled with flowers that stood near him, and presently commenced again : “Since I wrote to you at Rome, I——” There was another break, and Geoffry’s restless fingers were occupied during the next two minutes in strewing his note-paper with rose leaves.

“I wonder where she is?” he said presently. (This observation did not refer to Mrs. Herbert.) “Since I was at Rome”—“Oh, what a lovely day it is! too hot to write, really. I’ll go out into the shrubbery,” and he flung down the pen, snatched up his hat, and went in the direction where he had seen the flutter of Esty’s dress disappear half an hour before.

Esty had betaken herself to a favourite seat of hers, the trunk of a fallen beech, which the dark shadows, thrown by the birch and cypress overhead, kept impervious to the noon tide heat. The lower air was filled with buzzing of innumerable

insects, while the soft cooing of a wood-dove came at intervals through the long range of covert. The sun, which streamed through the lighter foliage of the lilac boughs that over-arched the path, played in flickered gleams over the moss-grown gravel, and on the edge of the red gold leaves of the dying beech, on which Esty was sitting. She had come to this retreat when Geoffry vanished into the library to write, as he said, to Mrs. Herbert, and there was still a pout on her lips, and a discontented expression in her blue eyes, at the thought that Captain Adair might as well have postponed his letter-writing until that time in the afternoon when Esty would necessarily be occupied in reading to her aunt.

By degrees the pout vanished, and the frown died away, as her mind became attuned to the soft calm of the summer day. There was a pond on the other side of her seat, and she sat and watched the

quick flash made on its dark surface by the dive of the water-rat and the leaps of the small pike.

“I wonder if he has finished his letter,” she said to herself, and then she dropped a clump of pebbles and grass into the pool at her feet; and in the splash and the whirr of the water she did not hear the sound of footsteps coming behind her.

She had clasped her hands before her, and looked musingly into the water, when presently she felt her heart stand still. “Esty!” a voice said at her ear. “My Esty!” and a hand and arm stole round her waist.

She felt as if she were in a dream; her breath came and went quickly, and all the scenery before her, the pond, and the willow that leant over it, seemed to be going round.

“Esty,” said the voice again, and this time it trembled with a thrill of half-repressed, half-expressed passion — “my

child! my darling!" Encouraged by her silence, or led away by an impulse impossible to resist, her lover moved his lips from the little ear where they had first rested, and pressed them timorously on her mouth. A rose leaf blown against her lips could not have caressed them more gently; but Esty started up as if she had been scorched by a firebrand.

"You had no right—how dare you!" she began, passionately; then she burst into tears, and, flinging aside Geoffry's proffered hand, rushed impetuously past him, and fled towards the house.

The young man pulled his moustache with a troubled expression. "Now, I did not in the least intend to do that when I came out," he said; "but I don't know how it was, I couldn't help it! Is she really angry? She seemed so; and if she is angry, it is because she doesn't love me; and I've made a fool of myself." Captain Adair finished his cigar alone in the

shrubbery, looking disconsolately at the wavering reflection of his face in the pond, and disturbing the quiet inhabitants of that sheltered pool by kicking in every stone, stick, or clod of earth that came within reach of his foot. "I will go and see if she won't forgive me;" and then he arose and began to walk slowly towards the house, feeling extraordinarily shy and nervous as he drew near the doors.

But when he got within, Esty was nowhere to be seen. He might "importune" all the "alcoves" in the house, but she was not in any of them, and he wandered nervously from room to room, and at last took refuge with Lady Renshawe, who had just aroused herself for tea.

"And where is Esty got to, I should like to know?" the old lady said, cheerfully.

Geoffry looked guilty, and said, "he was sure he couldn't tell."

Esty was lying on her bed, her face

buried in her hands, and her heart beating with a strange mixture of joy and anger. She had shed tears of rage during that run from the shrubbery.

“He insults me,” she said, passionately ; “he does not love me—he cannot respect me ;” but as she lay there, her eyelashes wet and her cheeks still crimson, one feeling rose above all the rest, and that was the knowledge that she could never forget that kiss—never while she had life. She could feel it on her lips now. While she compelled herself to feel angry at the giver, her heart thrilled with ineffable delight at the sweet memory of that caress. “I had never thought of this !” she said, in her foolish bewilderment, and she said truly ; for first love in the young is as pure and vague as the clouds on an alpine height.

She had united herself to Geoffry in dreamland, and in dreamland there had been no clasping of hands or touching of

lips ; and now, at the first breaking of the bubble, she stood confounded, red with shame and anger, and yet touched by a secret joy which would probably never again accompany a similar caress.

When the servant came to summon Miss Esty to tea, that young lady swept into the room where Geoffry and her aunt were sitting, and took no notice of the penitent glance the humbled warrior shot at her underneath his thick lids, or of the dewy suffusion which after awhile began to dim the brightness of his eyes.

Miss Lisle felt her heart to be in a softened and pervious state, so she erected a buckler of haughty defiance before her in case the enemy should discover the weakness of the country, and she determined for the next three or four days to treat the man whom she had just discovered she loved with marked coldness and disdain.

When Captain Adair retired to his room that night, he carried up with him the letter

he had commenced to Mrs. Herbert in the morning, and wrote that lady a long and effusive epistle.

It was some comfort to him, now that he felt unhappy, to pour out all his feelings to Sophy. He felt sure of her sympathy, and could not resist the impulse to call upon her for it, now that he felt uncomfortable and perplexed in mind.

CHAPTER VI.

“Sweet, silent rhetoric of persuading eyes.”
DAVENANT.

“When least I seemed concern’d, I took
No pleasure or no rest,
And when I feign’d an angry look,
Alas! I loved you best.”

PARNELL.

“WILL you come out this morning, Miss Lisle?” asked Captain Adair, meekly, as he stood outside the breakfast-room window the next morning, the half-smoked cigar withdrawn from his mouth, and his straw hat casting a soft shadow over the pleading expression of his eyes.

Esty leant out of the window, and pretended to be absorbed in the beauty of the roses that bloomed round the framework.

“I will come presently,” she answered, temporising with her consciousness.

“Esty,” he said, softly, drawing a little nearer to the pretty head that hovered above him, “do say you forgive me! On my honour I didn’t intend it. If I had any notion that it would have offended you so much I wouldn’t have done it for the world. Esty, I really—now do, do forgive me. I’ll never do it again, if you bid me not.”

“It was very wrong of you,” she answered, sternly; for with the perverseness of her sex, the more she was moved the more she was resolved to keep up the appearance of anger.

Geoffry looked dejected.

Had he not been in love he would have said, “Hang it, what a fuss about a trifle!” Being in love, he felt really unhappy at having incurred the displeasure of his goddess.

“You won’t forgive me?” he asked, twirling round the straw hat nervously in his fingers.

“No,” she said, decidedly; and Geoffry,

with the variableness of a lover, changed his mood, and with a muttered “d—— it!” flung his cigar into the cool recesses of a laurel bush, and walked away.

Esty felt blank. She was not prepared for this counter check to her anger.

A slight chill fell on her heart, and for a moment the sun lost its brightness and the roses their scent. She watched him until his hasty steps had traversed the length of the gravel path, and his figure had disappeared in the soft gloom of the distant avenue; then she withdrew her head from the window; and when Lady Renshawe sailed into the room in all the majesty of black satin and Spanish lace, her little grand-niece was seated demurely on a hassock, hemming a pocket handkerchief with more rapidity than regularity of stitch.

The old lady twitched the work out of Esty’s fingers and scrutinized it closely.

“Crooked as a ram’s horn,” she said. “I’ll finish it myself;” and she settled her-

self in her morocco chair, casting glances of defiance at Esty, as her wrinkled hand unravelled the misshapen stitches the young heedless fingers had formed.

“Don’t sit mooning there, child,” the old lady said presently, perceiving that her niece had found no better occupation than that of staring wistfully out of window and plucking to pieces the petals of the rose that had fallen from her belt.

“Put on your things and walk over to Gardenhurst, and ask your mother if she will bring your father and Christine to spend the day here to-morrow.”

It was remarkable, that while Lady Renshawe accorded to Mrs. Lisle all the full privileges and dignities of womanhood, she always seemed to regard her nephew in the light of an unpleasant little boy who was still to be coerced by strong means, as in those days when his youthful exuberance of spirits made him the terror and pest of Lynncourt.

"I shall send the carriage for them," she called out, as Esty prepared to leave the room. "And tell James that he is not to—I mean," she added, correcting herself, "ask your father not to smoke in it."

When she was left alone, Lady Renshawe nodded sapiently over her work, and said to herself:

"Just as well to get Esty out of the way for a bit. Who knows, those two young fools might be falling in love with each other!"

And while the sunbeams moved westward round the panels of the room, the old lady continued her work in silence, unbroken save by the whirr of a passing bird and the hum of bees in the flower-beds, quite unconscious that the two young fools had already fulfilled their destiny.

Meanwhile Esty passed rapidly down the meadow path that was to take her by a short cut to Gardenhurst, her feeling of disappointment at being put out of the way

of seeing Geoffry for some hours being considerably softened by the reflection that he would suffer as much if not more than herself at her temporary absence.

Cheered by this idea, she walked quickly through the thick sward, her restless hand taking wanton toll from the heads of gaudy poppies as she passed by the side of the ripening wheat; and soon the dim, vague sense of happiness which had attended her lonely walk was exchanged for the practical pleasure of kissing Christine's blooming cheek, and feeling Toby's rough paws patter round her ankles in a helpless ecstacy of delight—helpless, because the growing obesity of his body prevented its adopting the same lively method of showing his pleasure as was displayed in his agitated tail.

Esty was greeted warmly by her mother. Mrs. Lisle's pale face would flush, and her dim eyes sparkle, when she gazed on the growing beauties of her young daughter. Had Esty's skin been freckled, and her

features contorted, she would doubtless have been regarded by Mrs. Lisle with equal tenderness, if not with equal pride ; for such is the beautiful elasticity of a mother's love, that it accommodates itself to the nature of its recipient, and contracts with tenderness over an object whose weakness requires additional shelter of affection as easily as it can expand with pride over the perfections which all acknowledge and admire. But no one can deny that the last is the more pleasurable feeling. It is a divine kind of vanity which makes a mother rejoice to see a beauty—once, perhaps, her own—glow out with renovated lustre in the face and form of her offspring ; and the most cynical could not sneer at the complacency with which Mrs. Lisle would stroke Esty's bright brown hair, and hold the dimpled hand within her own, saying : “ Your hair is exactly like what mine was at your age, child ; and so is your hand. My hand was considered very beautiful

when I was a girl. The artists at Florence used to swear by it. You see, sculptors do not care for thin, bony hands ; they rejoice in rounded fingers, that terminate in pink tips and almond-shaped nails." And the mother would fondly caress the tiny duplicates that rested within her palms.

Colonel Lisle received Esty with mingled dignity and complaisance. In his heart he was pleased that the flower he had planted at Lynncourt should have taken such strong root into that ancient soil, but this pleasure was mixed with a little jealousy that Esty should have found favour which he had never attained in his aunt's eyes. He put aside his paper as Esty entered on this particular morning, and lifted his eyebrows with an affectation of surprise.

" Oh, here you are !" he said, carelessly ; then perceiving that Esty, after kissing him, was about to leave the room, he commenced to put a few leading questions :

" Well, Esty, how's the old cat to-day?" "The old cat" was the irreverent appellation which Colonel Lisle invariably gave his aunt, when speaking familiarly in the bosom of his family. Esty having assured him that Lady Renshawe was "never better" (an assurance which the colonel received with a discontented "humph"), he proceeded with his cross-examination : " And how does she get on with that young puppy, Gerald's friend ? What's his name—Hare ?"

Colonel Lisle knew perfectly well (none better) the correct name of his aunt's guest, but it seemed more dignified to feign ignorance of it ; besides, he had an instinctive conviction that his witting mistake would irritate Esther.

" Aunt gets on beautifully with Captain Adair," retorted Esty, with equal dignity. " She finds him a charming companion."

" Tut, tut ! I'm sure he must be as dull as death. What on earth can he find to do

all day in such an out-of-the-way place ? I can't think what can induce him to stay so long, unless he expects to get something out of the old girl. Do you think that *I'd* stay mouldering down here if I had his years and opportunities in life ?"

By which it will be seen that, with the denseness of age and its selfishness, Colonel Lisle had quite forgotten that there was a time when even he would have left the most brilliant society in Florence to stroll by moonlight, in a garden steeped in rich scents of tuberose and heliotrope, with his arm round Elinor Morley's waist ; and that in those days of youthful folly, solitude, thronged with a thousand sweet vague memories of pleasures past, and enriched with anticipations of pleasures to come, was very different from the loneliness which was oppressing Colonel Lisle now that all the bloom was gone from his life, and only the dry stalks left in his hand—now that his feet had no longer any upward path to

tread, and the “shadow feared of man” sat waiting for him at the bottom of the slope.

Esty looked rather conscious at her father’s surmises as to what on earth the young man could find to amuse him at Lynncourt, and she was glad to get away with Christine to the undisturbed privacy afforded by a thick-leaved mulberry tree, where the sisters exchanged confidences as they sat in the shadow—their fair fingers dabbling red berries into their mouths at every break in the conversation.

“ Oh, Christine, he is beautiful !” was Esty’s emphatic commencement; and her sympathising sister, with her face aglow with interest, asked :

“ What is he like ?”

Next to the pleasure of guarding such a secret as Esty now for the first time possessed, what could equal the delicious thrill of satisfaction with which she recalled the events of the last few days, to make her

sister a participator in all the mingled sensations of hope, doubt, and fear—all the varying emotions that had lately thrown such brilliant colour into the pure region of her “unstained thoughts?” I am bound to confess that the young girl was not altogether candid in her revelations to her sister; for, although she told of walks taken together, of thoughts exchanged, and of many other symptoms denoting the interest she and her lover had vested in each other, she never mentioned the little quarrel that was now dividing them, nor its cause. Something in her heart withheld her from making that kiss a subject of conversation even with Christine. Indeed, she flushed even now down to her finger-tips whenever the remembrance of it crossed her mind. Still, she revealed enough to make her sister suggest meekly :

“Ought he not to ask aunt’s leave, or papa’s, if he means to go on like this?”

“Oh, Christine!” Esty cried, with the

utmost distress in her voice. "Pray don't talk like that; perhaps he don't mean anything at all, and it's all my foolish mistake. I am sure nothing has passed that makes it necessary for him to speak to anybody, and I would not have told you anything if I had thought you meant to turn round like this."

Esty talked so fast and warmly that Christine withdrew her little suggestions, and felt quite ashamed of herself for having made it; but she was right, nevertheless, and Esty would have acknowledged this had the case been applied to any other person. But now she was swayed by the growing intoxication of a first love; and love is such a thief, so instinctively opposed to all lawful authority, that his devotees shrink from observation as naturally as a schoolboy out of bounds avoids the eye of his master.

Esty, observing that a slight cloud of trouble still obscured Christine's usually

clear face, skilfully turned her attention to another subject by telling her sister of the invitation she had brought from Lady Renshawe.

Christine looked delighted. "I shall see him again," she said, enthusiastically; "and I shall see the parrot, and the gold-fish, and the last new books, and have as many peaches as I can eat."

Esty smiled superior; the sublimer interests of love were beginning to dispossess such minor pleasures as had hitherto been held of account in her existence.

Christine, now that Esty had exhausted all the glowing rhapsodies born of Captain Adair's presence at Lynncourt, began slowly and methodically to unfold her little budget of news:

"Miss Jennings was here yesterday, looking more like a peacock than ever; her voice as harsh, and her attire as splendid. There is a passage about natural history in my Lemmi's Italian Grammar,

which says that Il pavone goes about pavoneggiando ‘peacocking himself;’ that just describes Phœbe. She hoped you were well, in a shrill vicious voice, which seemed to contradict the wish, and she inquired how long Captain Adair was going to stay at Lynncourt. She called him ‘Geff Adair.’”

“What impertinence!” said Esty, loftily.

“She says that she has often heard of him from some intimate friends of his, the Herberts ; and that the Herberts are coming to stay at Herbert Castle for the winter.”

“How does she come to know the Herberts?” asked Esty.

The notion she had formed of Mrs. Herbert was the reverse of what she would expect a friend of Phœbe Jennings’ to be.

“Mr. Herbert is M.P.,” said the astute Christine ; “he has to know and keep well with all sorts of people.”

"What makes them think of coming here, I wonder?" mused Esty.

"Perhaps they think it is time to re-assert their influence in the county; they have been abroad so long, you know."

Then Christine proceeded to confide to her sister many other bits of intelligence of a domestic nature. She feared that Gerald was giving trouble, she said. Mamma was getting to have quite her old, worn, worried look, and papa was more satirical than ever at breakfast when the letters came; as for Dolly, she was more like her own old scrubbing-brush than anything else, always rubbing people's temper the wrong way with the most brutal pertinacity. "And oh, Esty," said her sister, piteously, "I do wish that you could marry a prince, or some rich nobleman, and live in a house like Lynncourt, only more beautiful, and then we need never hear anything more of worrying bills, and mamma and papa could be peace-

ful and happy at the close of their lives, and Dolly should have a little house of her own to nag in ! Oh dear ! " she said, interrupting herself wearily, " I must go in and make papa's omelette for lunch."

" I'll come and help you," said Esty. And the two walked arm-in-arm over the broken clumps of what had once been cultivated garden beds, their young heads bowed close to each other, as they still continued to exchange their girlish confidences.

Mrs. Lisle, looking out from a window where she sat making calculations of a far less pleasurable nature, smiled as she saw them pass. " I have two very lovely daughters," she thought.

When Esty returned to Lynncourt that evening, the sun was getting low, and was sending burning shafts of gold along the boles of the old oak trees. She paused when she came to the last meadow that

separated her from the grounds, and rested her arms over the top bar of the little rustic stile she was about to cross. She paused with a sensation in her heart of intense happiness, not unmixed with awe. Her earthly Eden lay before her in the realm of those majestic groups of sun-tipped trees ; those golden ranges of gravel walks ; those grey urns, whose graceful forms were beginning to lose their distinctness in the soft film of the evening mist ; those flowers whose bright petals, cooled by dew, were exhaling even more fragrance than the noon-day sun had evoked ;—all breathed but of one idea and one image. She was, perhaps, hardly conscious herself of how much the charm of this sleeping landscape was owing to the touch of bright living passion that had sprung up in her heart. She did not know how dull that setting sun and how scentless the flowers would have appeared to her could she suddenly have learnt that the shrine had lost its jewel, and that the

young lover, whose presence was throwing such a magic radiance over all nature, had left her and Lynncourt.

As it was, the girl lingered in a leisurely manner at the threshold of her enchanted palace, plucking off the heads of the wild grasses that grew in the hedge, and staring into the flush of sky in the west, as though she would read there the end of all the wild sweet hopes that were filling her breast.

Presently, with a long slow sigh—a sigh of pleasure that seemed to drink in all the balmy odours of the evening air, all the music of the one thrush that sat carolling in the hedge beside her—she arose; and then her cheeks reddened and her heart beat, for she saw standing in the shadow of the avenue before her the object of her thoughts.

Geoffry was resting against the low bending branch of an elm; he seemed to be awaiting Esty's approach. Yet he did

not make one step towards her, and assumed (such are the puerile affectations of love) to be totally unconscious of her presence, although for an hour past he had nearly stared his eyes out in endeavours to see down the whole length of those misty undulations of distant meadow tracks, in the hopes of seeing the little figure which now he pretended not to perceive.

The young man felt indignant and low-spirited ; he was feeling the more indignant against Esty, because he had just received an unpleasant piece of intelligence—intelligence which, he felt inwardly convinced, would be as unwelcome to Esty as it had been to him. But he felt no pity for her possible distress. She had been unkind to him. “She does not love, or she would have forgiven me by this time,” he argued, and he looked at Esty with an appearance of sullen indifference, as she advanced nearer to him.

"I hope you have enjoyed the afternoon, Miss Lisle," he said, gloomily. "I didn't, I know, for you are cursed with an afternoon post here, and I have received letters by it which bring the reverse of pleasant news."

All the little flutter and consciousness with which the girl had approached him died out of her manner; she stopped short.
"What is it?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing that will interest you;" and he walked on, switching away obtrusive boughs with his cane.

"What is it?" she repeated, laying her little hand on his arm.

Geoffry's tone softened imperceptibly as he answered :

"I am under orders! It seems there is some chance of the regiment's going abroad, so they have recalled my leave, and I shall have to go back to-morrow."

"To-morrow!"

Esty repeated the word mechanically,

but she felt as though an iron bar were pressed down on her heart ; her eyes burnt and her pulse throbbed with what seemed to be, for a moment, intolerable suffering.

The increasing gloom prevented Geoffry seeing the stricken look that had come over her face, and while he wondered at her silence she had time to recover herself a little.

“ I should like to go over and say ‘ Good-bye ’ to your people,” he said, ruefully. “ Perhaps you will take me over there to-morrow morning ? ”

Esty having assented with a faint “ Oh yes ! ” the pair passed through the massive door of the house ; and, while Esty stole away through the shadow of the corridors to hide her face from the keen glance of her grand-aunt, whose stick was heard coming, with loud taps, down the front stairs, Geoffry sought his bedroom ; and, going up to his open win-

dow, rested his face on his hand with a sickening feeling of disappointment. He watched the wavering flight of a grey owl as it circled round the oaks in front of him, and thought sadly that by to-morrow at that time he should be far away from these soft-plumed woods and sylvan sounds, with nothing pleasanter to look at than a straight range of white houses and blackened chimney-pots. He thought of his friend Sophy, but only to turn from the thought with impatience. Sophy, with her worldly wisdom, her bright smiles, and brilliant toilette, had never reached the depths in his nature which this girl had.

“I love her!—oh, my God, how I love her!” and he turned, with a heavy sigh, from the window.

Presently he was startled by hearing a step outside the door.

“Who is it?” he said; but, as the sound was not repeated, he took no further

notice, until he had put out the wax candles that stood in the old-fashioned griffins' heads each side of the table; then he felt his way to the door, and, flinging it open, said again, "Who is it?" speaking more mechanically than if he expected any one to answer him.

He was answered, however, by a faint sigh and the sound of a repressed sob.

His heart stopped, and he trembled from head to foot.

"I am so sorry—I was—I didn't intend to—I hope you'll be happy when you're away; I have brought you a flower, Captain Adair, and dinner is ready." And the sentence, begun so brokenly, ended in a firm conventional tone.

But Geoffry, although he might be a fool (and had not that experienced judge, Mrs. Herbert, said he was one?), could not miss such an opportunity as this.

He drew the white-robed figure from the dark corner into which she had shrunk

into the recess of the window in the corridor, where the light of the rising moon shone down on her pale tear-stained face. He held her tight in his caress for a moment, unable to speak.

“She loves me!” he muttered, hoarsely. “She does love me after all!” and, still holding her to his breast, he turned his blue eyes up, with a light and expression in them which had something of ecstasy in it. “I am too happy,” he murmured. Then the red lips descended and showered passionate kisses on the shrinking face and averted throat. “I will make you pay for that kiss you so grudged me,” he whispered, and again she felt warm touches from his lips fall rapidly on her hair, cheeks, and shoulders. Suddenly he ceased.

“Do you love me?” he cried.

She paused.

She had come to him swayed by a feeling which, if strong, had still all the timidity of a woman’s first passion in it; and she was

feeling terrified and crushed by the violence of the storm she had evoked.

“ You will not answer me !” and he flung away the hand he had been holding, and turned to go.

He was determined to have a direct avowal from her own lips. He had suffered so much from doubt and anxiety that he swore to himself that he would not suffer more—at least, not on that score. From the moment he felt her heart palpitating against his own—at the first touch of her clinging arms—he felt autocratic, and his passion blazed forth in its full glory of power, intensity, and selfishness.

“ I *will* know !” he repeated; and the young girl, reeling forth in the moonlight, stretched out two warm round arms towards his neck.

“ You know I do !” she cried; and Geoffry caught her to his breast once more.

There, with the young head thrown back to meet his kiss—with the gleaming arms round his neck—the rounded bosom throbbing such wild pulsation on his breast, Geoffry felt, and felt truly, that to him in this world the acme of earthly happiness had arrived, and that time could bring no future to surpass the sweetness of this moment. |

The tapestry waved in the rising wind, and the grotesque figures embroidered on it, by fingers long since dust, nodded grimly by the side of these living pictures of youth and beauty. The moonlight flung cold gleams on the rusty breastplates and battle-axes that adorned the walls; and if the dark-visaged ancestor of Lady Renshawe, whom Holbein had immortalized in the panel above the fire-place, could have spoken, he must have owned that of all the specimens of life that had shown an utter disrespect to and disregard of his presence for the last four centuries, none had ever

formed a more lovely group than this boy and girl who stood in the window babbling of love that was to live for ever—of passion that would survive all earthly changes, and that would even extend to the memory of the one who should be called first by death from the other's side.

CHAPTER VII.

“Continual burning—yet no fire or fuel,
Chill icy frosts in midst of sunniers frying,
A hell most pleasing, and a heaven most cruel ;
A death still living, and a life still dying,
And whatsoever pains poor heart can prove,
I feel and utter in one word—I love.”

P. FLETCHER.

“If it be love to wake out all the night,
And watchful eyes drive out in dewy moans,
And when the sun brings to the world his light,
To waste the day in tears and bitter groans ;
If it be love to dim weak reason’s beam
With clouds of strange desire—and make the mind
In hellish agonies a heav’n to dream,
Still seeking comforts where but griefs we find.”

DRUMMOND.

ONCE more the clocks were ticking gaily in the drawing-room in H—— Street; the parrot swung himself slowly backwards and forwards in his ring, rejoicing in the hot sun, and giving out, in a choked voice, sleepy invitations to some unknown person to “come along,” and not “be shy.”

This little drawing-room, with its abundance of down cushions and yielding ottomans, presented somewhat the appearance of a comfortable fluffy nest. And Sophy, who sat ensconced in the softest cushions of the softest chair, with her face sullenly drooped on her full white breast, her brown eyes giving out restless intermittent light, and her hair shining a burnished brown, like the hues of a pheasant's wing, rather resembled a dejected bird buried in ruffled plumage than a prosperous matron, happy in the possession of wealth, station, a good husband, fine children, and an excellent digestion.

"Fool! fool!" she was murmuring to herself in a voice that had a ring of acute anguish in it. "Why did I not prevent his going? Why did I not take him with me to Brighton?"

She took up and re-read an opened letter that lay by her side on the sofa. It was a letter in which Geoffry had poured out,

with passionate egotism, all the hopes and fears that had agitated him during the last few days of his sojourn at Lynncourt. “Sometimes I cannot help thinking that she loves me.” ‘Poor fool, of course she does!’ interpolated Mrs. Herbert, savagely. “There comes such a beautiful rosy flush on her cheek if I address her suddenly”— Sophy looked involuntarily at the reflection of her own pale olive-tinted skin in the glass before her—“but I think that it may arise from shyness”—‘Shyness! stuff and nonsense’—“and then I am all down again. Forgive me, Sophy, if I bore you; but I know the kindly interest you have always taken in me, and how disinterested your affection for me is.—‘What fools men are!’ again interrupted Mrs. Herbert, grimly, ‘to imagine that one ever takes a “kindly interest” in them for *nothing*!’—I have no one but yourself to confide in, no one but yourself to fill the part of a sister to me. I fear that you will think me a fool, but if you

could only see her—see how much more lovely, more clever she is than any woman I have ever met, you would cease to wonder at my infatuation."

"Should I?" murmured Geoffry's confidant, as she tore the letter into a thousand little bits. "*Should I?*" and then she got up out of her cushions, and walked quickly up and down the room. Presently she flung herself down again, and began to piece together the bits of the letter she had just destroyed; but she could glean no comfort, no consolation from those torn remnants of Geoffry's confidences. Her hot eyes stared blankly at such disjointed sentences as "ran away like a wounded bird; soft lips; so modest and pure."

Words which indicated that Geoffry's sense of delicacy had not been so keen as Esty's, since he had evidently not preserved the same reticence as she had done in the matter of that little episode of the beech tree.

Sophy crushed the torn sheet in her hand with such violence that the inside of her fingers were indented and bruised by the rings that encircled them.

“He writes this puling nonsense to me—to *me*—who am dying for him!” And the unhappy woman clenched her fingers in the soft meshes of her hair. “I have been loving him, yearning for him all these years. I was the first woman to love him. I had at least that prior claim. My heart has been taken from my duties, and has gone forth wandering after him ever since I first saw his boy’s face. What have the days been to me?” she continued, passionately, as her hands pulled at the golden pendants that drooped from her ears. “What have the days been to me since my heart has been burnt up with love for him? the moments passed away from him have been as leaden and cold as those breathed by dying men; those spent with him so feverish and restless that I yearn even for

the pain of his absence to be free of such terrible disquiet. / If he could but love me; if I could but live to see once his eyes and lips turn towards mine with passion in them, I would be content to die—to die at that moment in the plenitude of my youth, beauty, and happiness.”/ Her voice sank into a low sob as she spoke that last word.

Happiness could never come to this woman, who had allowed ungoverned irregular passions to storm her life until they had made a broken wreck of it.

The harbour might lie smiling and peaceful beyond her, but she must be carried for ever on advancing and receding waves, without sufficient force to reach that calm shelter.

While Geoffry had been indifferent to other women, she had been able to bear the wound of that indifference when displayed towards herself. She had nourished her passion on the kindly looks and words

which their intimacy had naturally evoked from him. As a starving man snatches at broken scraps and morsels of food, and, from the relief afforded to his hunger, rates them as highly as a gourmand does the most delicately-flavoured dish, so had Sophy fed her hopes on the most trivial proofs of interest evinced towards her by Geoffry, until she had nearly fallen into the delusion of believing that such proofs were all that any woman could ever win from him ; that his light-hearted unconsciousness of manner indicated a want of depth, an absence of feeling, which would render him as impervious to the charms of others as he had been to those she had so lavishly displayed to him.

She was now suffering the cruellest mortification it is possible for a woman to experience. Wounded alike in her vanity and in a love which at once comprised all the best and worst feelings of her nature, she was completely crushed by the

unexpected blow. She felt inclined to doubt the power of her own attractions; she looked at herself in the mirror, and laughed a little, bitter, hard laugh as she scanned the eyes, hair, and figure which all other men but the one man whom she loved had found so irresistible. She was like the unhappy enchantress who found that her beautiful shepherd had at last awakened to love, but to love not her.

Mrs. Herbert had lived such a peaceful life—a life so unbroken by any sorrow or reverse—that she was utterly unconscious of how far it was in her nature to feel deeply should any occasion arise to call out the full force of her passions.

Since the night when her tearful eyes pleaded to Geoffry with an emotion that met with no response, she had experienced no stronger sensation than that of a mild affection towards her husband, a somewhat stronger feeling for her children, and an overwhelming regard for herself. She

loved herself; she loved the placid sensuous warmth of her nature, which enabled her to appreciate so thoroughly all the good things of this life. She loved her satin, sleek skin, and would delight in stroking the rounded arms, and in contemplating the little feet, not less rounded and dimpled. She liked to pass her hands through the thick masses of silky, warm-coloured hair, which would have put to shame, with its soft luxuriance, all the hard artificial knobs which modern fashion has ordained shall disfigure Englishwomen's shapely heads. She revelled in the abundant nature of her beauty, and she would watch in the mirror all the undulating charms of her figure as she moved across her room with something of the satisfaction, it is supposed, the peacock experiences when he expands his brilliant plumage in the sun. This self-satisfaction of Sophy's was far removed from any of the ordinary flutters that attend conceit. Indeed, her admiration of

herself was so genuine and deep-seated, that it rarely showed itself in any outward gesture; but when accident brought any of her personal graces to her mind, she certainly rejoiced in their possession. She rejoiced, too, in the serenity of temper which enabled her to dash away small troubles from her mind with that facility ascribed to ducks of flinging off water-drops. She rejoiced in her husband's adoration, wherein she perceived so clearly the potency of her own charms, and until now she had confided in the belief of her imperviousness to any acute form of suffering.

She had misjudged her own strength. She did not dream how she had nourished her love for this boy, until it had wound itself round and round her heart, to sting like a serpent, when its poisonous nature was once provoked.

Sensual, selfish, narrow-minded as she was, she was still a woman. What there

was in her of good as well as of evil had gone to feed this huge furnace of misapplied devotion.

She had even prayed for him—and murmured her otherwise somewhat rare orisons with a feeling not so incongruous as might have been imagined, since she only begged for that which was good for him, without any reference to her own feelings—feelings which even she did not dare to think of under such circumstances. She was a lyre on which his hand might have played at will, had it cared to do so; but he did not care, and so the music was wild, wayward, and fanciful, coming out in fitful exultations, or wailing monotones, as was natural, seeing it was governed by woman's ill, and not by man's control.

It was four o'clock; and as the gold chimes on the mantelpiece announced the hour, Mrs. Herbert rose, and almost mechanically began to shake out her dress and smooth her hair.

She was very miserable—but that was no reason why she should be less lovely than usual. Presently she heard Geoffry's step on the stair; and, as she stood there—her red lips apart, to admit of her quicker breathing—her colour coming and going under her clear skin—her feet still, as though frozen to the ground, but her bosom heaving rapidly under the soft lace that lent a subdued charm to its beauty,—it would have been a very fastidious eye that would not have been gratified with such a picture of ripe, womanly perfection. Surely no one but a pre-occupied lover could have been blind to its merits.

But such was the man who came bounding up the stairs now, and who greeted Mrs. Herbert with such warm cordiality of manner that she seemed to feel herself shrink and wither before the blighting sincerity of his unconcern.

Geoffry had that light in his eyes and gladness in his tone which rarely bless a

man more than once in his life. It is thus with him when he is conscious of possessing a secret treasure, of hoarding a joy too deep for words, but yet which he will endeavour to put into broken, incoherent language, from the necessity felt by his soul to send the delight that is within out to the world, that all who will may take reflected pleasure from his.

Sophy thought that he looked handsomer than ever, as he stood leaning over her chair, with a high-bred grace of manner peculiar to him.

“ Well, Sophy,” he said, with a cheerfulness that was positively irritating to the woman who had spent the last few hours in such torture of spirit.

“ How are Herbert and the children ?”

Without waiting for an answer, he went on.

“ It’s quite a godsend finding you in town ; I didn’t think I should see a soul I knew, nor did I until I came here. What

on earth brought you up?" then, dropping his voice involuntarily into an inflexion so tender that it made his auditor grind her little pearl-like teeth, he continued :

"I've told you my secret, Sophy."

There was a pause. Mrs. Herbert watched mechanically the motes that danced in the sunbeam, and paid particular attention to the proceedings of an over-weighted and perplexed spider, which had not constructed a web sufficiently strong to bear the combined weight of himself and his captive fly.

Then she steadied her voice into what was after all a hoarse, unnatural sound, and answered :

"I suppose I am to congratulate you." She gathered strength and composure with the effort of speaking, and continued, more fluently :

"How is it, Geoffry, that you, who have passed scathless through the perils of London seasons, should have fallen captive to a

little rustic like this Miss Lisle ? it's like the princess, who, rejecting all the straight, fair sticks, was obliged to put up with the crooked one at last."

The tone of her voice was hardly congratulatory as she said this.

"I don't know," said Geoffry, simply, "I am sure, how it happened ; but as for London seasons, Sophy, I don't think I could ever fancy a woman for my wife who had run the gauntlet of *them*. Such women are all very well to flirt, talk, and dance with, but a woman to be attractive to me must have the bloom and freshness of youth on her mind as well as her person."

Sophy winced.

"True," she answered, softly. "Your feeling is one which is natural for a man to possess before marriage, and while his feelings only are under discussion ; but when he is married, and his wife becomes a practical, and not an ideal, portion of his life, I think he generally wishes her to glide

pleasantly into her place in society : and if she cannot do so—if the nature of his little daisy's previous life makes her unfit to herd with hot-house flowers—he is the first to be annoyed at the failure of his transplanting."

" Why," said Geoffry, with a light laugh, and his blue eyes sparkling kindly at her, " you talk as if I had picked up a female Orson in the woods. You do not know that one of Esty's principal charms to me is the richly-cultivated intellect she possesses. All the best hours of her young life have been spent, not in the close atmosphere of London *salons*, but in serious studies and simple pleasures. You and I, my dear Sophy, have spent two wearisome years in being bored by every variety of the human fool that society has turned loose on us; but my little Esty has suffered no such interruption to the poetry of her youth. She has had trees, flowers, and sky for her out-of-door com-

panions; she has not yet learnt to appreciate the advantages afforded by a secluded woodland corner for picnic and flirtation, but she can find keen delight in watching nature's changes as they spread slowly over the face of her favourite trees, and sit motionless for hours in the summer sun watching all the varied specimens of insect existence, flashing into life and motion under its genial influence. Confess, Sophy," he added, laughing, "that your interest in a butterfly would begin and end in this."

He lifted up a little case adorned with dry moss, wherein butterflies of many hues disported themselves (according to the fancy of the arranger of them) on gold pins.

"I didn't do those," said Mrs. Herbert, shortly. "I am not cruel."

"Nor is Esty," said the unconscionable egotist, enthusiastically:

"Her feet spare little things that creep."

Oh, Sophy, she has such lovely feet!"

"Prettier than mine?" said Mrs. Herbert, with a faint smile; showing a wee pair of French boots pressing lightly on the footstool before her.

"I don't know quite," he said, candidly; "but I think they are."

He put down his hand, and spanned the silken shod instep, which Sophy had tipped gracefully over the other.

A "thousand little shafts of flame" seemed to burn up in her at the light pressure of his hand. Her lip quivered, and her face worked convulsively.

"Leave it alone," she said, petulantly, withdrawing her foot. "Of course it cannot be compared to that of your paragon." There was a pause; and then, with a great effort, she recovered some of her usual cheerfulness of manner.

"I wish you every success, Geoffry, and I shall love your *fiancée* like a sister of my own."

"Yes; but look here, Sophy, I know

it is in your power to do me a great favour."

"What is it?"

"Well, you must know that I came away from Lynncourt in such a hurry that I had not an opportunity of speaking either to Miss Lisle's father, or her grand-aunt. I told my darling that I should write by to-night's post; but since I have been in London I have ascertained that we are actually under orders for India. Now, how on earth am I to write to Colonel Lisle, and speak of my wish to marry his daughter and my going abroad in the same sentence?"

"Why not?"

"Why, Sophy, you must see!" the young man exclaimed, emphatically. "I have little enough to offer as it is, Heaven knows! I cannot settle much more on my wife than the worth of my commission, and if, in addition to these disadvantages, I give her the option of going

to India, or a long engagement, cannot you imagine what her parents' answer will be?"

"What is it that you want, Geoffry?"

"I want time—more time in England—that I may spend it in trying to soften any prejudices that I may have to contend with on their part. Lady Renshawe loves me so well for my father's sake that I think I could win her over to my side if I could see a little more of her."

"And what good can she do you?"

"She is wealthy, and, consequently, powerful in the family. Moreover, Esty has been her favourite companion and relation for years past, and is considered to be her grand-aunt's peculiar charge. If the latter favours my suit, I don't think I should have much difficulty with the rest of the family."

"And what can I do for you?"

"You have great influence with General S——, and if you would exert that influence to obtain me two months' leave,

you would be doing all that I require of you. Two months would be quite sufficient for me to ascertain the nature of my future prospects. Only fancy," he continued, dreamily, "in eight short weeks I might be holding my darling to my breast as I looked back on old England with not a regret in leaving it, if I took such a treasure of happiness with me."

"Oh, Geoffry, Geoffry!" cried Mrs. Herbert, with a cry of pain. "I cannot bear it. I——" Then she checked herself, and said, more soberly, " You are selfish, Geoffry, and are forgetting that we, at least should feel regret at your departure—we, who are such old friends."

"Forgive me, Mrs. Herbert—Sophy, dear, forgive me!" Geoffry cried, impulsively. "I am horribly selfish, I know; but I am so bewildered by the novel sensation of my happiness, so troubled as to the means of carrying it out, that I am not responsible for my actions to-day, and I

must look to your old and tried friendship to pardon my extravagances. Please forgive me that thoughtless speech ; you know that I did not mean it. You must know how sorry I shall be to lose your society. Say you forgive me, Sophy ?”

And the young man who, in the plenitude of his happiness, was loth to think that any one near him should be annoyed or vexed, tried to raise Sophy’s head from the dejected attitude into which it had drooped, as he gently pulled it towards him by a tress of her hair. She looked up, and, for the first time since this interview, met his eyes.

She had not dared to seek to meet them before, fearing lest the trouble of her soul should find too much expression in her glance. As it was, the look she gave was a terrible one—such a one as a wild animal, suffocating with rage and pain, might cast towards the hand that is descending to deal its death.

For one moment Mrs. Herbert felt as if further concealment of her feelings was impossible. She longed with inexpressible longing to throw her arms round his throat and cry,

“Pity, forgive, and love me a little, for I am loving you to madness!”

But ere the tumult in her heart could rise to her lips, Geoffry had released his hold of her hair, and was looking eagerly round the room as though in quest of something.

“What is it?” she asked, faintly.

“I am looking for writing things. Will you give me some, Sophy, and then I can write my letters here?”

“It will seem more natural to write to her here than in that noisy club,” he said, looking complacently at the waving white curtains and the bright array of flowers in the window that threw a faint fragrance over the pleasant, soft-hued room.

He walked up to a heliotrope, and picking

a blossom, smiled sweetly, as he inhaled its perfume ; his face wore a far away look for some minutes after, as he lazily caressed the parrot that stood watching him with furtive eye and crooked claw.

Sophy arose, and with somewhat unsteady footstep walked to her escritoir. "Here are pens, paper, and ink," she said, in a tired voice. "You can write here, Geoffry."

"And you'll do that for me, about General S——?" the young man pleaded, turning round his radiant face on her.

"I will do all I can," she answered, hesitatingly.

"Oh, you can do it well enough if you'd only try, Sophy ; or Herbert can do it, he and you have influence which a poor, penniless fellow like myself could never possess had he twenty times such gallant fathers in the service as mine was. But of this you may be sure, Sophy, that General Adair's son will never ask for anything unbecoming a soldier to grant : if it were active as

well as foreign service I was ordered on, I should not hesitate for a moment. Now, Sophy, you will help me all you can, won't you?"

"Yes," she said, "I will do all I can;" then she seated herself at a little distance from him, and stared again at the sunbeam, seeming to hear from a great distance off the hurried scratching of his pen along the paper, as he rapidly covered sheet after sheet with rough, eager sentences.

Nearly an hour elapsed in this fashion, and then Geoffry got up, and, thrusting his letters into his coat-pocket, advanced towards Sophy with an apology for having remained thus occupied so long in her society.

She started at the sound of his voice; and, as she looked up, a less careless observer than Geoffry would have noticed what dark rings had deepened round her eyes, and how grey the tints about her mouth had become.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"To post my letters," he said. "I have written to her father and to Lady Renshawe to explain matters, and to ask their consent; but these I shall not send until I hear the result of your mission to General S—."

"And the other?"

"The other is to *her*," he said, flushing; "I suppose I ought not to send it before the others can go, but I cannot let a day pass without communicating with her, besides I must explain to her the reason of my delaying to send the other letters."

"At any rate do not go now, Geoffry," said Mrs. Herbert, sweetly; "considering the length of your visit here to-day, you must own that I have seen very little of you; the first hour you occupied in conjuring up Miss Lisle's image to your mind; the second in writing to her. Now, do stay and have a cup of tea with me as in the old times, and talk to me a little about yourself."

What man ever resisted such an invitation as this last? Geoffry hesitated, and finally succumbed to the fascinations of Mrs. Herbert's easy chair, only stipulating that his letter should be sent at once to the post-office that it might be in time for the country-post.

Mrs. Herbert rang the bell.

"Francis," she said, as her quiet, well-trained servant answered her summons, "Take these letters at once to the post," (she had added a heap of her own to Geoffry's one), "and be sure they are in time——"

"Stop!" she continued, as the servant was withdrawing; "go up into your master's dressing-room, there are some there which I have addressed to be forwarded to him."

"So Herbert isn't in town, then," asked Geoffry, for the first time awaking to the fact that he had spent a two hours *tête-à-tête* with Sophy without interruption from her husband.

"No;" she said, under her breath; inwardly she was saying to herself, "It all hangs upon a chance."

"I have got a new picture to show you," she said, presently, and she glided out of the room, leaving Geoffry occupied in pouring out her tea.

She was back again almost directly, but when Geoffry asked what the picture was, she seemed perplexed as though she had forgotten all about it; however, she speedily turned his attention to some other subject, and exerted herself so successfully to please him that the next half hour passed as pleasantly as was possible under the circumstances.

"You will not forget, Sophy, dear, to write to the general," he said, when he at last took leave of her; "I have no doubt of your success, but if you should fail——!"

"Yes?"

"You must let me know as soon as possible, that I may have a chance of running

down to Lynncourt before I go, to set matters as straight as I can. Good-bye, Sophy, I shall never forget your kindness to me—never!" so saying, he pressed her hand affectionately, and passed with light footsteps down the stairs and out of the house.

Sophy went to the window and watched him walk swiftly down the street; as he turned the corner he looked round and waved his hand gaily. When he had quite disappeared she drew a deep, long breath, and came back again to her former seat; then she let her hand slip gently down the folds of her silk dress until it reached her pocket, from which she extracted the massive-looking epistle which Captain Adair had confided to her servant's care an hour since.

Her hand shook and her eyelids quivered as she looked at the envelope, and she felt a sickening oppression over her heart as she broke the seal, not because of the dis-

honour and treachery of the thing she was doing, but because she shrank from seeing those expressions of tenderness directed towards another, which she would have given worlds to have had addressed to herself.

For a moment she thought she would burn the letter without perusing it, but then the miserable curiosity which causes those who love to pry into the inmost heart of the object of their affection, even when they are conscious that such knowledge will be fraught with the keenest pain to themselves, conquered her first impulse, and she tore the letter open, and read as follows.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Slow are his steps that leave a heart behind.”

GREME.

“MY OWN,

“Do you know what a world of pleasure lies in those two words? That you *are* my own, and that you allow me to call you so, comprises all the joy of my existence; you cannot imagine how blank everything seemed to me when I left you yesterday,—the whole world was lying behind me in that garden, and I was going out to non-entity and oblivion.

“Once or twice, I felt as though I *must* turn my feet back. I longed so desperately to hear again the sound of your voice; you have in a brief space become such a part of me that I wonder how I could have lived so many years without you.

"One thing is certain—and that is, I can now think of no future in which you are not. If it were not for the deep joy with which your love has filled my heart, I could not face the sorrow and annoyance of that which I have to tell you; but I am treading on air, and trouble—even the trouble of parting from you, which is the heaviest I can suffer, seems far off and trivial.

"My dear love, I find that I am under orders to sail with my troop sooner than I expected. It is possible that, through the interest of a friend, I may get it put off for two months longer; if so, I shall spend the greater part of those two months at Lynncourt striving to win your people's sanction to our love. If my application for leave fail, I do not know what on earth I can do. I fear under the circumstances that I should be utterly rejected by your parents. I could not bear to ask you to act in defiance of them—still less could I bear

to give you up. That would be too terrible. Remember ! whatever happens, we must never give each other up. Should I be obliged to go, I shall still have time to run down and bid you good-bye, and then we will concert our measures together. But I hope and believe that I shall gain the extra two months,—and who knows what will happen ! I may, perhaps, gain first your grand-aunt's approval, and then my own darling for a wife. I have been alone all my life till now, but could I win you for my own, I should feel as though all the sweetest ties in life were concentrated in the one that bound us together. Good-bye, my treasure ; the touch of your lips is thrilling me now ; should I live to be a very old man, I shall never forget that June day I first found out how dear you were to me.

“ Once more, good-bye, my first and only love.

“ Yours,

“ GEOFFRY ADAIR.”

Mrs. Herbert read this letter rapidly, and yet every word seemed to sink into her mind, as though they had been conveyed to her with the slow distinctness of a sermon.

“And I thought this man could not feel,” she muttered, as her hand involuntarily clenched the paper into a crumpled ball. Then she smoothed out the folds and applied a lighted match to their thick, creamy edge—she watched the flame first curl slowly round Geoffry’s signature, then ascend in a wild leap, consuming his name with its progress. She watched, until all that was left of his passionate outpourings to his distant love lay in a few grey ashes that smouldered in the grate at her feet; but long after the paper was dust, she saw one sentence as vivid as ever before her eyes: “My first and only love.” She could not escape from it—it haunted her sleeping and her waking hours; she had amply reaped her punishment in the base breach of trust she had committed, for those words were doomed to cling to

her tortured memory for many a long day to come. Did no thought of others cross the selfish passion that aimed but at its own gratification ? Did she feel no compunction knowing that she might bring life-long sorrow and trouble to the man whose love she coveted ? No pity for the poor little heart, that was throbbing with restless anxiety down amidst the dew-laden woods of Lynn-court, far away, and utterly unconscious of the treachery that was being perpetrated against her ; but praying for the morning light which she expected would bring to her her lover's greeting ? No !—it was not likely that Sophy should pity her rival when she could not even control the cruelty of her passion for Geoffry's sake ; she had been wrought to such a pitch of unexampled anguish in that interview with him, that she had but one thought left, one hope, one determination : and this was, that the time might come when Geoffry should sue for that which he now could not

even perceive ; and that, come what might, he should never be happy with another woman. "She would rather he died," she thought, with a sullen gleam in her brown eyes. After she had stared in silence for some time at the ashes of his letter, she went to bed, and as she heard the wind, which had risen with the night, howl round the roof, she clung to her lonely pillow with a kind of terror, and even wished for the shelter of her husband's arms.

CHAPTER IX.

“Lo stral voto ; ma’ con lo stral, un voto,
Subito usci, che vaola il copo a voto.”

TASSO.

“On her whom all my sufferings cannot move,
What pray’d I rashly for ?—my maddening prayer
Ye winds disperse unratiified in air !”

GRAINGER’S TIBULLUS.

WHEN Mrs. Herbert descended to her boudoir the next morning, she found two letters on the breakfast table—one was in George Herbert’s handwriting, a handwriting firm and precise, thoroughly suggestive of the writer ; the other was Geoffry’s impulsive-looking scrawl.

Mrs. Herbert had hardly recovered her nerve yet, and her pale cheek turned paler, as she eyed the letters askance, while the

servant hovered round her with the breakfast things.

These little motionless squares of paper that lie so quietly amidst glittering tea-cups and fresh-baked rolls—how much of our destiny they may convey in their innocent-looking, travel-worn envelopes ! Sophy waited until she was alone, and then she opened first her husband's letter : it was sensible and short.

"All was well," it said ; "the children sent their love and would be glad to see her again ; he himself should come up to fetch her that afternoon, and, with best love, he was ever hers,—G. H."

"I have only just time, then," said Mrs. Herbert, as she consigned George's note to her pocket ; then she turned her attention to the other one.

It merely contained a few hurried lines from Geoffry, entreating her to lose no time in applying for his leave, since, unless it was given at once from head-quarters,

he must that very night go down to Gravesend to join his men.

"I do not ask you now to try for the two months' extension," he said; "it would be almost impossible to obtain it at so late a moment, but for Heaven's sake do try and get me the two days' grace, that I may see my love's face once more before I go."

Sophy smiled.

"Is it likely!" she thought. Then she ordered her brougham, and drove to General S——'s house, which stood in one of the quiet, shady streets leading out of Piccadilly.

The hour was still so early that there was no one likely to notice her as she passed swiftly through the streets, enfolded in voluminous pure-looking draperies, with her mellow face glowing like a faint-coloured autumn peach. No one, indeed, excepting a meditative butcher-boy, who was shouldering his tray close to General S——'s area-gate, and who ejacu-

lated, as Sophy drove up : " Blest if here ain't a five o'clock turning out at ten by mistake ! "

" Ask the General to be so very kind as to come and speak to me for a few moments," said Mrs. Herbert, as the door was answered by a highly respectable-looking butler. Presently the General appeared on the threshold, radiant in shiniest of boots and black satin stocks, his face bright and clean-shaven, and his white moustache glistening like a clump of snow, with the sun on it.

" My dear madam," he said, with old-fashioned courtesy, " you do me much honour by this visit. It is the first time," he continued gallantly, " that the sun has ever penetrated so early into my windows."

" General," interrupted Sophy, abruptly, " you remember what I told you the other day about that young friend of mine, Captain Adair ?"

"Yes, yes ! sad case, very ! I remember : poor fellow got into some low entanglement—going out to India. Best place for him. Not that India is the best place for a man disposed to run those risks," added the General, correcting himself.

"When does the troop of the —— Lancers sail ?"

"Really, my dear lady, I forget. If I had my papers here, or Janson, my clerk, I could tell you immediately."

Sophy groaned inwardly. "His memory is like a sieve," she muttered. "I will take you down to Whitehall, General, if you will allow me," she said, with her sweetest smile ; "and then I shall enjoy the double advantage, first, of your society on the way ; secondly, of getting the information I require when we arrive there."

The General, nothing loth, called for his hat, and got into the brougham ; and Sophy, with her usual tact, made the drive so pleasant to him that he rode along with

a misty idea that he was a young man again, diffusing as much pleasure by his attentions as he felt in receiving them.

"Wait here, my dear," he said, when they arrived at the door of his office. While he disappeared upstairs, Mrs. Herbert sat watching the handsome giants that sat motionless in the archways, and wondering who was ever going to make up to them for all the lost time their big bodies, and what amount of intellect they possessed, had wasted in their mimic vedette.

Presently General S—— reappeared. His usually serene face seemed much troubled as he put his head in at the carriage-window, and said, in a low voice:

"Your young friend is now under orders to be at Gravesend, and the troops will embark to-night."

"I suppose," said Sophy, "that if he were to attempt to gain a few hours' delay, he could not do so now, could he? Supposing he were to wish to meet that—that

person?" (and Sophy looked down with an air of embarrassment, which touched the old man immensely: he worshipped modesty in a woman). "And to do so, risk disobeying his orders——?"

"He would risk his commission!" the General said, sternly. "What little time he has will be fully occupied in getting the troops on board. To say the truth, my dear," lowering his voice still more, "we are accelerating the despatch of troops as much as we can. There are ugly rumours about."

"What, what are they?" said Mrs. Herbert, in a sharp, quick voice.

"There is bad news from India," the old soldier replied, sadly. "I fear we may have heavy trouble there. The morning papers will tell you as much as I know," he added, reservedly. "But, as for your young *protégé*, if I'm not mistaken, he'll have such man's work cut out for him in the next year as will put all women out of

his head ; for as soon as he lands he will be sent where the disaffection exists most. Good morning, my dear lady ; I have so much to do. You will excuse my leaving you. Where shall I tell them to drive ?"

" Home," she said, in a low, suffocating voice.

And home she went accordingly. She felt it difficult to breathe as she passed swiftly through the sweet morning air, and all surrounding objects of houses, people, shops, seemed blended in one hideous phantasmagoria that danced wildly before her eyes. " Oh God ! oh God ! if I have sent him to his death !" she said. " What have I done to you, my darling ! Oh, my darling, my darling !" With the passion of the appeal that rose from heart to lips, her eyes seemed to get loosened from the hot bands over them, and she wept fast scalding tears. She had never calculated on this. The worst her selfishness had allowed her to anticipate for Geoffrey was

that he should be exiled, perhaps only for a year, and that at the end of that time she would secure his return home. "He should come back cured of his boyish passion," she thought, "when his eyes would be opened to her riper charms." At any rate, he should have the opportunity of forgetting this folly. For the bitter heartache he might feel she had no sympathy, but she was all but maddened by the idea of any personal danger touching him. When she got into her own drawing-room again, she felt scorched by the bright rays that shone through the west window. She loathed the cheerfulness of the flaunting flowers, and the irrepressible trill of the canary, and she flung her head down on the table with wild self-abasement, crying out for her "love, the man she loved, and whom her love might murder." She soon rose to her feet. While Geoffry was still within reach, it was not likely that her grief should lose its restless im-

petuosity ; besides, there was yet more to be done, and Sophy was not a person to let her hand "grow faint to its work," when she had once undertaken it. "I must see him," she thought ; " I must see him to dissuade him from writing again to Lynn-court." Inwardly her heart told her that, come what might, she *could* not let Geoffry go without seeing him once more. She ordered her carriage again, and drove to Captain Adair's club. She sent up her card, and sat with bloodless lips, and with hands twitching nervously at her ermine muff, until he came running down the steps. His face was white with excitement.

" It's of no use, Sophy," he said, hastily. " I'm off directly ; and even if you could have got me those two months, I could not have accepted them, dear. Don't be vexed about it," he added, kindly, fearing Mrs. Herbert might reproach herself with her ill success.

"Why not?" she gasped; anticipating, yet dreading, his answer.

"You haven't seen this morning's paper?" he said. "If you read the telegrams you will understand that any man with a spark of man-like feeling in him must be mad to get out there as soon as he can!"

"When are you going?" Mrs. Herbert asked, with a stiff look in her face, which was with her a symptom of intense mental pain.

"Almost directly. I must save the 12.50 train to Gravesend. It was very kind of you to come, Sophy; I am so glad to have seen you again."

A softer gleam came into Mrs. Herbert's eyes, but it passed away as he continued:

"I did so want to consult with you about Esty. I fear she will be—be—" and there came a break and a gulp in the young man's voice, "very much upset at not having seen me before I went. The only comfort is to think that she will have got

my letter this morning, which will have prepared her in some degree for the blow."

Sophy said nothing ; but her hand twitched out a large piece of fur from the muff she was twisting round on her wrist. He went on eagerly :

"Are you and Herbert going to stay in X—shire, this autumn ?"

"Yes ; Herbert wishes it, and I have no objection."

"Then you will only be some eight or ten miles from Lynncourt. Sophy ! will you indeed act the part of a true, kind sister to me, and look after my interests when I am gone ? Will you make my future wife's acquaintance, and take every opportunity of letting me know all about her ? How she bears my absence, and how the family seem inclined towards me ?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Herbert ; "I will be sure and make her acquaintance."

"Not acquaintance only, Sophy ; you must be a friend to her—as good a friend

as you have always been to me. You are older than my little girl, and there are a thousand ways in which you can be useful to her. You are sure to like her for her own sake, Sophy ; she is so pretty and clever!"

Which last supposition of Geoffry's proved that he was a very young man indeed.

Mrs. Herbert looked at her watch, and her breath came and went quickly, as she saw how little time there was left before he must leave her. "Oh, Geoffry!" she said, "Oh, Geoffry!" and she laid her hand on the arm that was leaning inside the carriage window.

"You will do what I ask, dear, won't you?" he responded, looking down on her with his blue eyes a little dimmed.

She withdrew her hand as if she had been stung.

He did not attend to the movement, but went on talking hurriedly : "It's an awful

blow to me, not being able to say good-bye to her ; but I shall write again to her to-night."

" Do you think that will be wise ?" asked Sophy, anxiously.

" Why not ? One letter cannot make much difference, and I haven't said good-bye to her yet. I will not write again after this once, if you think I ought not."

" Certainly you ought not," Mrs. Herbert said. " Reflect on what you are doing, Geoffry ; either you must write to her parents and obtain their sanction to your engagement with Miss Lisle, or you must give up all communication with her until you are in a position to claim her ; what will they think of you if they find you have taken such advantage of Lady Renshawe's kindness ?"

" That's what troubles me," the young man said, flushing, " I cannot bear that her people should think I've acted meanly. I have written to Lady Renshawe."

" You have ?" said Sophy, sharply.

“Yes; here is the letter. I have told her everything, and begged for her interest with Esty’s father and mother. I have entreated her to advise me what to do, and I shall be guided by her answer. If she says, ‘Speak out like a man,’ Heaven knows how glad I shall be to do it. If, on the other hand, she counsels me to wait until I have better prospects to offer, I will accept my lot with patience; anyhow, I could not take Esty out with me now.”

“Give me that letter,” said Sophy, speaking as though under the influence of a sudden impulse, “I will take it myself to Lady Renshawe. Herbert used to know her a little, and she liked him, and will not look unkindly on his wife and your ambassadress. I shall be able to judge what will be the best opportunity of giving her your confession, and, as of course you will keep me *au courant* with your movements, I shall be able to give you the first intelligence of how things are going on. Trust

me, Geoffry," she added, with an earnestness not altogether assumed, only she was actuated by a very different motive to that which Geoffry imagined was sending fire to her eyes and voice. "Leave it all to me, and you will see that I shall manage infinitely better for you than you would even do yourself."

Geoffry shook his head ; he had very little knowledge of human nature as yet, but passion sometimes, with its instinctive truthfulness, supplies the place of acquired wisdom.

"It is best to go straight to the point in a subject like this," he said ; "so, if you don't mind the office, Sophy, I should be very grateful to you ; but you must communicate with Lady Renshawe at once."

"I will do so at once," said Mrs. Herbert, eagerly ; "and now, Geoffry, is there nothing I can say for you to Miss Lisle ? no little token you can send to her through me as a proof of my intimacy with you, and my desire to aid her ?"

"Oh, thank you a thousand times, Sophy ; how kind and thoughtful you are ! Give her this," taking a pin containing a small antique from his scarf : "she knows it well. Give it to her from me. Since you are to see her, I will not write again to her until I hear that all is right. Plead my cause as though I were your brother, Sophy. And now, good-bye ; it is time for me to be off."

"I will take you down to the station," Mrs. Herbert said, in a subdued voice.

So Geoffry despatched his luggage, and then jumped into the brougham, not sorry to have friendly companionship during that long, weary drive to Fenchurch Street.

On arriving there he bade her an affectionate farewell, thanking her earnestly for all she had ever done, and was about to do for him, and then he disappeared up the stairs, and Sophy, with a heavy weight on her heart, said, "He is gone!"

But love, ever tentative, all-enduring love, rarely leaves a hope ungrasped by

which he can climb to the summit of his desires, and her next thought was, "I will see him again."

When Geoffry turned from the adjustment of his small luggage in the otherwise empty carriage he occupied, Sophy's face, peach-like no longer, but of a dull paleness, with black rims round her eyes, making them look like those shadow-swept orbs Lawrence delighted to paint, appeared at the window.

"Good-bye, Geoffry!" she said, gaily. Heaven knows what it cost her to speak thus, but she felt that this last movement of hers required some subterfuge of easy manner to cover its singularity. "And—oh!—well, there is nothing else I can do for you?"

The whistle sounded. Mrs. Herbert hastily put her head a little more into the shadow of the window.

"Kiss me, Geoffry!" she said, piteously.
"God knows when we shall meet again!"

He leant forward and kissed her with a cold affection, which made his kiss fall like an ice-drop on her hot, tortured heart.

" You will write to me, Sophy, and let me know directly you have seen her ? "

" Oh, yes ! " she said, vaguely. She felt as if she should lose consciousness, and she grasped one of the railings on the station to prevent herself falling.

The train moved slowly on like a great, black, torpid serpent waking from apathy to sullen life ; the faces that appeared in the carriages began to get misty and blurred before her straining eyes. She saw only one thing distinctly, and that was the bright bare head of short curls that still kept its station at the window.

" Sophy ! " he called, and she was at the window with a speed which nothing but intense mental excitement could have lent her footsteps.

" What is it, Geoffry—*my* Geoffry ? " she muttered.

"Be sure and say 'good-bye' to Herbert for me. I shall write to him on the first opportunity. Good-bye!"

The train increased its speed, and he was really gone. Mrs. Herbert crept down to her carriage, and was speedily conveyed to what her husband imagined was an abode of domestic bliss—her own home.

"Oh! that I could have gone with him!" she cried, when she reached the privacy of her bed-room and threw her arms out wildly on the bed as she lay there stunned by the force of her own emotions. "Oh! that I could die for him!"

But yet she did not once feel that she would choose as an alternative that Geoffry should have stayed in England secure from danger of his life, and been happy in the love of Esther Lisle.

"Curse her!" said Sophy, vindictively, as she laid her cheek on her pillow that night.

She had returned to Brighton with her

husband, and had been wrought almost to frenzy by the irritation his *mal à propos* questions and calm placidity of manner had occasioned her. If, like herself, he had been crushed by some great sorrow or agitated by strong anger, it would have better suited the stormy nature of her feelings. As she lay motionless on her pillow, her brown-red eyes staring like coals of fire from the masses of snowy drapery that surrounded them, she could see light streaming through the open door of the dressing-room, where two of the children slept, and hear her husband's voice, accompanied by a childish treble, as he repeated, "And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." To most women such a sound would have been an inexpressibly sweet and soothing one to have sunk to rest on; but Sophy turned round impatiently :

"I wonder if George would forgive me my trespasses if he knew all!" she said.

CHAPTER X.

“Send me some token that my hope may live,
Or that my easeless thoughts may rest and sleep.”

IT was the evening after Geoffry's departure, and Esty walked under the shadow of the limes where she and her lover had so frequently trodden down the dewy rifts of grass together, and wondered whether she was most happy or most miserable.

The memory of his parting kiss was very sweet to her. When she thought of his love, she felt as if her world of gardens, trees, and flowers was all too small to hold the exultance of her happiness. But there was bitter mixed with the sweet. He was absent; and, as the shadows grew deeper on the land, and it

became time for her to return to the house, she loathed the solitude he had left behind him.

Where was he now? Walking the deck, perhaps, and looking at the first dim star that was peeping out above the fir-trees, whistling some snatch of song her voice had made dear to him, or recalling to his mind those words yet dearer which she spoke when her arms were round his neck in that last embrace, her eyes corroborating the oath which her tongue swore, "to be true to him for ever—to be one with him in heart, even though their feet should be hundreds of miles apart."

"We love each other, and what can separate us now?" she said simply, in answer to the look of anxiety that clouded his eyes as he bade her "Good-bye!"

"No man feels happy in leaving a newly-acquired treasure unguarded. How do I know some other fellow won't be falling in love with you?"

"I don't think I could even see any other while you were in my thoughts," she said, in a low voice, and the doubt cleared away from his eyes, and he believed her—believed her as man ever does believe during that hour of delirium when he is pillow'd on Delilah's breast, and has not yet felt the click of the scissors amidst his hair.

The box from London had come to Geoffry's hand two days before he left Lynncourt, and it was pleasant to see the quiver of delight with which Christine had inspected the beauties of her work-box, lifting the satin lid as reverently as though each recess contained saintly relics, and finally carrying off her treasure with a glance in her blue eyes which spoke eloquent thanks to the donor of it.

Next Captain Adair unrolled Dolly's ribbon, and that venerable woman received it with a scrutinizing glance, which seemed

to read the quality of the silk through and through.

"It's none of your three-halfpenny a yard," she murmured, complacently, as she curtseyed her acknowledgments.

Colonel and Mrs. Lisle were scarcely less pleased with the young man's courteous remembrances of them.

"Very pretty of him, really," the colonel said, eyeing the fragrant bundle of cigars with the anticipatory look of enjoyment which beams on the visage of a dog that smells a bone coming his way.

The presents were not sufficiently valuable to cause any discomfort in the mind of the receivers, while they were so suited to each person's taste as to be peculiarly welcome to all.

Mrs. Lisle felt the tip of her paint-brushes tenderly with her fingers; her own brushes had been worn to the stump for some years past, and it was pleasant to think that she could paint her next picture

without being irritated by the adhesion of numberless camel's hairs to the wet surface of her canvas. But to Esty came the greatest delight from the recesses of that deal box; her present was enclosed in a small morocco case, and it was given to her by Captain Adair in a dusky corner of the Lynncourt shrubbery, with a whisper that sent the warm blood running up to the little ear that hearkened to it. She never showed this present to any one, and, when asked what Captain Adair had given to *her*, was hypocrite enough to produce a roll of new music which he had procured for her some days previously.

It had been agreed, as may have been gathered from Geoffry's revelations to Mrs. Herbert, that he should either return or else write immediately to Esty's parents to ask their sanction to an engagement between him and their daughter. Neither he nor Esty doubted the result of this appli-

cation. Love is so sublimely insensate that it walks blindly over pitfalls and sloughs which more rational people discreetly avoid. What man who suffers from the mingled embarrassment of a large family, and an overdrawn account at his banker's, can recall without a shudder the insane resolution he and his wife took many years past, to link themselves together to eternal discomfort? And what lovers like these two, smitten with their first madness, could be expected to appreciate the objections parents might raise to a union in which love and hope were the chief ingredients?

Geoffry's own modest income had always seemed sufficient for himself, and looking at it through the generous magnifying glass of love, it appeared to expand into actual wealth when he talked to Esty of her sharing it with him; removed from the charm of her presence, and when about to bring his proposals before her parents, his

means seemed to shrink to their more natural proportions ; but even this shadow of a doubt never crossed the girl's mind ; "the fated fairy prince" had come to her at last and set her heart afire with the touch of his lips ; henceforward she viewed him through that glamoured veil Love casts over the eyes of all his devotees ; her prince's robes were genuine purple, and his ermine truly royal.

If anyone had suggested that a long course of privation—in which dunning tax-collectors, imperious landlords, scanty meals, and threadbare habiliments were disagreeable but inevitable incidents—might weary their affection, she would have laughed them to scorn ; with the scorn that sits so richly on the lips of youth—when youth has strengthened itself with that sublime selfishness called love for another.

On the evening I have mentioned, Esty paused several times during her lonely walk under the limes to pull out and regard

stealthily the little oval of ivory whereon was the “counterfeit presentment” of her lover’s face. It was pretty to see the wariness she exercised during these stolen glimpses at the interior of that cherished little case ; but she need scarcely have troubled herself, for, excepting the sleepy caw of a benighted rook, or the sudden drop of an acorn at her feet, there was no sound to disturb these darkening glades, no foot but her own to crush those wind-drifted heaps of dead leaves.

When she returned to the house it was tea-time, and her grand-aunt was already seated at the table. Lady Renshawe checked Esty’s impending apology :

“Don’t mention it, my dear,” she said, kindly ; “I know it’s a way girls have got when they are deprived of the society of an admirer. They invariably take to damp arbours, lonely strolls, dead leaves, and wet feet, as naturally as their lovers adopt less innocent forms of distraction. Men are not

generally so reckless of health as women are under these circumstances. They become pensive over cigars, and look sentimental at their glasses of cold brandy-and-water ; but they rarely omit to put on their great-coats in the night air, and never forget their meals."

Esty looked grave under this badinage : other men might attend to these trivialities, but she felt convinced that *her* "Prince" would gallop over any road that led to her,—whether golden or stony,—with the same reckless indifference to self.

After tea aunt and niece sat round the fire : the latter as usual reading aloud, while the former dozed slightly, awaking with a start whenever the reader's voice seemed to relax its efforts. At last the dozes lengthened in duration ; and Esty, gently laying down her book, gave herself up to meditation. She was staring into the fire, and had just succeeded in discerning in its embers a lovely *Château en Espagne*, where

she and Geoffry stood hand-in-hand on a lofty turret, looking down over a wide expanse of foaming seas, purple plains, hills, valleys, and cities, sparkling amidst all like "grains of salt," when her fancies suddenly died away in the blaze before her as she felt her aunt's hand touch her shoulder, and the wrinkled face peered kindly into her eyes as the countess said, significantly :

"He has spoken, has he?"

The girl looked up for an instant, and then hid her face in the folds of the elder lady's silk dress.

"Oh, aunt, how could you guess?" she cried in a tremor.

The countess looked at her tenderly.

"I am not so old that I have forgotten all the signs and symptoms of youth," she said. "Do you think he loves you, child?"

"Yes."

"And you love him?"

"Yes."

Again there was silence in the room for

awhile. The younger woman's eyes were all dazed by the beaming glory of the future ; she sighed with pleasure, and felt inclined to weep for joy. The countess, with her feet on the brink of an unknown world, shrank alike from contemplation of the past or future ; there was something that agitated her once as this girl was agitated now, but it had died away in that wrinkled breast years and years ago, and left bitter in place of sweet.

“ When is he to speak to your parents ? ”

“ In a day or two ;—he is coming back here to ask you all ;—only he may have to go to India, and then he will write. Oh, aunt, do let me tell you all about it ! ” And Esty lifted up her face, all flushed and eager, yet with a shy look in her eyes as she poured out her confession, glad of an excuse to recall every detail of that beautiful dream of the last few weeks. “ He may come back for a couple of days ; but, at all events, he is sure to write ; I am

to hear from him to-morrow," she said, in conclusion ; " I wonder what they will say at home ; they *can* have no objection to him ; can they, aunt ? "

In her heart Lady Renshawe thought it improbable that the lovers would meet with any opposition from Colonel and Mrs. Lisle. Geoffry had, probably, inherited a large portion of his deceased mother's fortune, and what exception could be taken to his person, manners, or morals ? All that they had ever heard of his good qualities from Gerald Lisle had been confirmed by personal observation.

" He seems good, brave, and frank, and I imagine his income won't be less than £5000 a year," the countess thought. " What could we wish better for our Esty ? "

But it was a duty she owed to her age and experience not to encourage her niece by being sanguine ; so she shook her head gravely, and said :

" We will hope for the best, my dear ;

but now let us go to bed, for it is getting late. It gives me great pleasure, child, that you trust and confide in your old aunt ; but when you are my age you will find yourself prone to sleep through the most interesting of love-tales. Go to bed and dream of your letter.”

“I quite forgot to say that Geoffry is not rich,” Esty thought, as she lay in bed that night, with a flood of moonlight streaming over her white draperies and virginal face ; “but of course that will make no difference.”

The next morning she sang as she ran down-stairs to the breakfast-room, and sang still louder as she stood on the front door-steps waiting for the letters. The fresh, sweet air of the morning and the glitter on flower and leaf seemed to harmonize pleasantly with the hope in her heart. She plucked off a bit of scarlet geranium that grew in the vase on the steps, and placed it in her belt.

"Surely he must be coming now," she said.

But only the cattle passed through the morning mist that hung over the meadow path by which the postman was expected; and Esty had to return to the house, for the breakfast bell rang, and she knew her aunt and the servants were assembled for prayers.

When the prayers were concluded she looked eagerly over the breakfast-table to see if the expected letter was there. One glance sufficed to prove her disappointment. There were several letters for the countess, but none for Miss Lisle; Esty sat with a tightening over her heart striving to swallow her breakfast as unconcernedly as possible, and looking very straight at an elm-branch that waved before the opposite window.

"At my age and with my property one only gets begging-letters," the countess said, with a cursory glance at her own packet. "Thousands of destitute orphans recommend themselves to my care; clergy-

men seem to propagate large families for the express purpose of throwing them on my hands ; while there are churches and asylums unlimited that threaten to fall down or collapse entirely unless supported by my charity. How fortunate you are, Esty, only to expect one letter, and that——”

Lady Renshawe paused suddenly, for Esty's empty hands and pained face told the story of her disappointment, and her aunt felt grieved that she had made so untoward a remark.

“I wonder if it is accident, or whether he is like all the rest of them,” the countess muttered. She said, aloud :

“I dare say there has been some delay in the post with your letter, Esty. Meanwhile, read one of mine.”

Lady Renshawe tossed over a little cream-coloured note, the contents of which were more interesting to Esty than her aunt was aware of.

Miss Lisle flushed when she read the

signature to this note, “Sophia Herbert.” So this was Geoffry’s female friend,—the original of that bold, massive head and dark-brown eyes. She was coming down to Castle Herbert, and she hoped that she might be allowed to renew an acquaintance which she and her husband had so much valued in bygone days.

“Did you know her, aunt?” Esty asked, gloomily.

She had been expecting to grasp a rose all the morning, and lo! her hand seemed filled with nettles. Something that was neither jealousy nor suspicion, but a vague compound of both, passed over her heart when she found that this “friend” of Geoffry’s was coming into her neighbourhood.

“What does she want with us? why does she come here?” she thought. Then she reproached herself for the doubt. “May he not have firm friends in women as well as men?” But her mind recurred again to

the brown eyes and sensual mouth, and she sighed involuntarily.

"I knew her very slightly," the countess said, in answer to Esty's first query. "Him I knew for many years before his marriage. A kind, good, true man is George Herbert. He brought his wife to call on me on the occasion of their first visit to Castle Herbert, and since then I have not seen her."

"What was she like? Did you admire her?" Esty asked eagerly.

"Hum! I don't know. She was handsome certainly, but not attractive to any old woman who likes to see fresh, young, spring-like faces. This woman might have sat for a representation of autumn, she was such a brown, full-bloom sort of beauty. I don't know what her object is in renewing her acquaintance with me. There are rumours of a dissolution of Parliament. Perhaps George Herbert feels uncertain about his seat, and wishes to secure my interest with my tenantry on his behalf."

"And, perhaps," Esty whispered to herself, "it is in some way connected with Geoffry."

The countess guessed the purport of Esty's murmur.

"I see we are ascribing different motives to the same action," she said. "The difference in our years is so great that this is not to be wondered at. Fancy two travellers arguing from different points of a hill, one tottering on the summit, the other looking upward from the base. If their voices could reach one another what a diversity of opinion would be expressed, the former breathing of cold and caution, the latter extolling the warmth that seems to shine on the far-off peaks! *You* fancy that this little attention of Mrs. Herbert's is connected in some way with Captain Adair. It is a part of love's mania to believe that every one else is in some way touched with the same disease. I am convinced that prudence lies at the origin of this little note. What a

goose you are, Esty ! What can Captain Adair know of Mrs. Herbert?"

Esty was silent. She was ashamed that her uneasiness should have been detected ; and the countess, when she sent a gracious answer to Mrs. Herbert, was quite unconscious that Geoffry was even acquainted with the "full-bloom beauty" whom she promised to welcome to Lynncourt whenever the latter would honour her with a visit.

The rest of that day lagged very wearily to Esty. She was glad when the rooks began to caw good-night in the elms, and the sun sank behind the black gloom of the firs.

"So many more hours to post-time," she thought ; by the time night came, hope was fresh again in her mind.

"To-morrow ! I shall hear to-morrow," she said, as she heard a distant clock tolling away the hours ; but when the morrow came, her face was even sadder than before, and helpless anger filled her heart as it

rebelled against the weight of her disappointment.

“He promised he would write or come. Why does he not write? but, perhaps, he will come yet.”

But although she watched the park-gates until her eyes ached almost as her heart, she never could discern any form more interesting than that of some working man slouching home at the end of the day’s labour, or the village children, who were permitted to pass through the park on their way to school, and who made Esty’s heart throb many a time in vain as she heard the click of the distant gate when occupied in reading to her grand-aunt. Day succeeded day; autumn faded away into winter’s bleak winds and dark skies, and yet Esty neither heard from nor saw her lover. Colonel Lisle had read to her from a newspaper that the ship had sailed in which Captain Adair and his regiment had embarked. And Esty was left to solve by herself the

miserable riddle that haunted her night and day. "Why did he not write? had he ceased to love her?" The countess, who had been watching with secret concern the unhappy look in the young face that was so dear to her, at last thought it "her duty to speak."

"You have not heard from him, child?"

"No."

Such a piteous "No" it was, that the countess was unable to speak for a few moments. When she did raise her voice again, it sounded older and more trembling than ever.

"Then he is a scound——!"

"Hush, aunt, I won't have him spoken against!" Esty cried, in a sharp tone. So the countess finished her anathema under her breath.

"Have you told your parents, or Christine?"

"Must I?" the girl faltered. "I had not yet, you know, because he said he would write to them himself, and that would have

been so much nicer. I had told Christy, just a little bit before, when I was so happy, and now it seems so hard, oh so hard!" and she bit her lips nearly through in her effort to keep down the sob that was rising in her throat.

"They ought to be told," the countess said; then, seeing how Esty shrank from the idea of laying bare her unhealed wound, she added, "but, if you like, my dear, I will tell them all myself, and arrange that you shall not be troubled by having the subject mentioned to you again—will that do?"

Esty kissed her aunt tenderly. "You are very kind," she murmured; and then she ran away to her room, and sobbed as though one dear to her were dead.

"Oh, Geoffry, Geoffry! you cannot mean it! Surely you did love me; and if you *did*, how can you have changed in so short a time? It is so hard to understand," she moaned; when she heard the carriage wheels drawing up to the front door, she

sobbed afresh, for she knew that the countess was departing on her mission to Gardenhurst.

"I should have been so proud to have told mamma, had it been otherwise; and now they will think hard things of him, and call him what aunt did."

Struck by a sudden thought, she jumped up and ran down-stairs, all tear-smeared as she was, just in time to put her head in at the carriage-window ere the countess gave the order to depart.

"Auntie!"

"Yes, child."

"Don't let them judge him too harshly, he may come back, you know!"

The countess shook her head.

"If a woman values her peace of mind, she should let her first doubt be her last," she said, sadly; "however, I will do my best."

As the carriage rolled away, Esty gave one more wistful glance at those park-gates through which she had so long and vainly

expected the advent of some token from her absent lover. A man on a horse was advancing towards the house, and for a moment her heart beat wildly with a vague hope, as she walked down the path to meet him, but the horseman proved to be a servant in livery, who brought a note for Lady Renshawe, directed in a handwriting Esty had learnt to recognise as Mrs. Herbert's.

"I wonder if *she* has heard anything of him," Esty thought. When the countess, on her return, informed her niece that an invitation had been received at Gardenhurst for Colonel and Mrs. Lisle to dine at Castle Herbert, and that a similar invitation was given to "Lady Renshawe and Miss Lisle" in the note the servant had brought over that day, the elder lady was astonished to find that her niece's face expressed a faint gleam of satisfaction.

"You don't mean to say you would like to go?" the countess said.

"Yes, aunt, I think I should."

"Then, my dear, you shall go with your father, and I will get you down a new dress for the occasion."

"Oh, thank you, very, very much," the girl said, gratefully; and the countess looked pleased, and congratulated herself on having so rapidly encouraged her niece's wish.

"Do her all the good in the world—give her an opportunity, perhaps, of seeing some fresh face, that makes the old love seem still farther off than he is. I would do anything to see her look her own bright self again for half an hour!"

So the countess wrote one note to Colonel Lisle, announcing her wish that Esty should accompany her father to Castle Herbert (Mrs. Lisle had declined going on the plea of ill health), another to Mrs. Herbert to announce her acceptance, in her niece's behalf, of their kind invitation, and a third to Madame E——, requesting her to send

down from London a dressmaker to measure Miss Lisle for an evening dress.

“White silk and tulle, lilies of the valley and pearls—that will do,” the countess said, musingly, as she sealed up the last of these communications. “That wicked young poet with the Welsh name talks about ‘one nail’ driving out ‘another;’ if Esty finds a new nail at the Herberts, I only hope the old one will feel every tap of his successor through the head. I hear there is a large party staying at the Herberts.”

Meantime Esty was seated at her bedroom window, her eyes looking wistfully down over the leaf-strewn path. “If I could but see you for five minutes,” she thought, “even though it were to hear you say that all the past is as nothing to you, and that you did not really love me; but to sit here through these sickening hours, in ignorance of what it is that is dividing us —this is what is so hard to bear. It is as though you were shut up in a dungeon

near me, and you kept silence so that I did not know whether you were alive or dead."

The evening arrived on which the Lisles had been invited to dine at Castle Herbert, and Mrs. Herbert sat before the looking-glass, smiling a little smile of pleasure at the beauty reflected in the glass opposite to her.

She had paid more than ordinary attention to her toilette to-day. Not for worlds would she have appeared but at her beauty's height on this night, when she was to meet her rival. A red rose peeped out from the folds of her bronze-coloured hair; a slight touch of rouge heightened the rich light in her eyes, and diamonds trembled brilliantly at every movement of her head and throat.

Mrs. Herbert scorned the notion of not adorning herself with jewels when she played the part of hostess. Diamonds became her, and she rarely allowed etiquette to interfere with the most favourable display of her personal charms.

There was still an hour to elapse before

her guests for the evening would arrive; Mrs. Herbert put on a cashmere dress, and dismissed her maid, bidding the latter to return in half an hour, in time to put the finishing touches to her mistress's toilette.

The maid had barely quitted the room when Sophy's attention was attracted by the sounds of footsteps outside the window. She put her head out, and her gaze fell on the figure of Mr. Cadogan, who was walking up and down the gravel path, cigar in mouth, and seemingly absorbed in the perusal of a newspaper.

“‘Dark faces pale against the rosy flame,’” quoted Mrs. Herbert, dropping a rose-bud at his feet as he passed under the window: “What a mild-eyed, melancholy lotus-eater you look, Mr. Cadogan.”

He glanced up quickly at the sound of her voice, his face no longer deserving the epithet of pale, for that rare pink tinge rose to his cheeks as he looked at the beautiful head leaning out above him, with

bright lights striking across the rippled hair and over the white breadth of bust, somewhat liberally displayed between the uneven folds of her wrapper.

"Come down," he said, in a low voice.
"I want to speak to you."

Mrs. Herbert nodded her head. "In the boudoir," she said; and then she walked swiftly from the window, and entered her husband's dressing-room.

George Herbert was seated in an easy-chair, by a comfortable cosy fire, his head thrown back, and his eyes closed in slumber. His wife looked at him for a few minutes, to assure herself that he really slept, and then she gently placed a newspaper by his side.

"He will never be able to resist the *Times*, if he does awake before I return," she argued, as she left the room, and ran quickly down the little flight of stairs that led to her boudoir.

It was a pleasant little room at all times,

but never did the chamber Sophy reserved for her own especial use appear to so great an advantage as in dusky twilight-hours like these. Dead leaves might flutter past the window-pane, winds might mutter in the elm branches, and rain-drops thicken on the leaves, but the outside desolation only enhanced the charm of this sleepy-cosy little Paradise within. There were easy chairs that would have tempted the most wakeful anchorite to slumber ; there was a marble statuette of Love, with his finger to his lips, turning an exquisitely dimpled chin away from the fire, as though he shrank from the genial light that played on his polished neck and close-curled head. Highly-finished French photographs were scattered over the room, picture-frames gleamed from the dimness of the walls, and sweet scents came from a stand of hot-house plants that stood in a recess by the window.

“ I like this room,” Mr. Cadogan was saying, half aloud, when Sophy entered the

door. On seeing her he got up, and went forward, eagerly, to meet her. "Shut the door," he said, imperiously. "You must," he added, seeing that she hesitated. "I particularly wish to speak to you, without interruption."

She closed the door, and walked slowly across the room, apparently unconscious of the ardent look with which he followed her every movement; but, in reality, not a single symptom of his state of mind escaped her. She sat down on a low cushion by the fire, and, taking up a sandal-wood fan, fluttered its pleasant odours backwards and forwards before her face, while she quickly revolved her position in her mind :

"The game is nearly played out," she thought. "The brute will fondle his chain no longer, and in the acme of his passion will find strength to snap it."

She decided, if possible, to avoid perceiving the climax, which she felt was at hand. Many a time she had diverted a

restive horse from battling with her by affecting unconsciousness of its design. Mr. Cadogan was showing "temper," but by bowing her head the storm might pass away over her, and spend its rage in air. While she meditated in what manner to speak to him, he was standing near her, his arm resting on the mantelpiece,—his impassioned eyes drinking in the full measure of her beauty.

"What is it you wish to say?" she began, in a soft voice. "It is getting late, and Herbert will expect me back to finish dressing."

"D—— Herbert!"

"You can d—— Herbert as much as you like in solitude, and thus avoid offending the good taste of his wife. Let me go now; I will return later."

Be it observed that when a woman pleads to be "let go" from the society of a man, the very plea proves that she has lost the right of enforcing it; so it may be con-

jected that Sophy's intimacy with Mr. Cadogan had made considerable progress since that hour when he stole a kiss off her shoulder, and she forgot to rebuke him for it.

Her wounded vanity had been consoled by his adoration ; but now that a tone of menace was mixed with his passion, she rebelled inwardly against her self-inflicted bonds, and almost loathed the gaoler whom she herself had set to watch at her heart's door ; but if her disgust at this man was great, her love for another was greater ; and, when her jealous fancy pictured Esty and Geoffry Adair as being re-united, she vowed that she would deem no self-sacrifice too great that would tend to separate them. She had risen to go as she uttered that last speech, but he seized her wrist, and forced her back to her seat.

“ No ! ” he said, in a determined tone ; “ you have played with me long enough ; it is time to be serious.”

“ What do you mean ? ” she faltered ; but the slight tinge of alarm in her tone was affected to gain time. In all matters, save where her own especial madness was concerned, her self-possession never deserted her.

“ What do I mean ? ” he said, bitterly. “ I mean that you have made a plaything of my love. You have made me mad about you—so mad that in your presence I have no control over my eyes, lips, or heart. My eyes bless you, but my lips curse you ; my heart is torn in two between anger and adoration. I know that I am as nothing to you in comparison. I pray all day for a look of love in your eyes, and I see nothing but indifference. In my fondness I try to think that it is caution that represses the sigh I crave for ; but reason tells me that real love would peep from out the thickest veil that caution ever swathed it in. I seek your hand when you are near, and your fingers never know that mine

close on them. I detect your voice among a dozen others, and you fail to hear me even when I address you. Don't imagine, Mrs. Herbert, that because I love, I am utterly blind! My very passion sharpens my perceptions. By all that I feel I know what you lack. I am a slave where I had hoped to be master; but the most faithful of slaves would throw down the implements of labour if he knew there was to be no termination to—no appreciation of—his life-spent toil. I will leave you, Sophy since you cannot love me. I will go tomorrow, and you shall never see me again to be the trouble of my days, the torment of my nights."

His face was set in such a sharp look of pain that Sophy felt almost penitent as she looked at him.

"Must you go?" she said, softly, inclining her head a little nearer to the hand that hung over the back of her chair.

He took up a tress of her hair that had

fallen loosened from the burnished mass behind her ear.

He stroked it gently, and the contact lent fresh agitation to his manner; he bent his head down and passed the lock before his lips.

“Oh!” he whispered, more to himself than her. “If I could but win her love!”

She turned round and looked earnestly at him, and he returned the glance with such a world of passionate entreaty shining in his eyes that her own fell involuntarily.

“What would you do to gain it?” she murmured.

He knelt by her side and put his arm round her waist.

“I would give up the love of father, or mother, or child, to gain yours; I would sacrifice wealth, name, and position; I would consent to be a leper, loathed and loathsome for the rest of my life, if, while I was yet sound, I had been blessed one short month with your love. Oh, Sophy,”

he added, his voice dying away in a sob, “don’t ask me what I would do; rather tell me what there is I would *not* do to gain that for which I thirst as men withered by drought pant to hear the bubble of water. Oh, Sophy, my love, my love! I die for you. I am starved for the want of you!”

Mrs. Herbert looked at him with wonder. She had not thought he could have expressed his love in such eloquent fashion; she did not put much faith in his offers of self-sacrifice, she took a tolerably correct estimate of them when she judged them to proceed from the excitement rather than the solidity of his affection.

“It is now or never,” she thought. “To-night he will do all I ask—to-morrow the chance will have passed away;” yet she hesitated, for hardened as she was, it was difficult to her to say that which was in her mind.

“What could I do for you?” he murmured, his lips still caressing the detached tress of hair; “how could I serve you?”

Something in her face had awakened a hope in his mind, and he looked wistfully at her while he awaited her answer.

It came at last, although with evident reluctance. She had been less than human if such a proposition could have come trippingly from her tongue.

"Would you," she said, looking at him askance, "do anything to please me?"

"If you loved me—yes!"

"Would you marry another woman?"

Cadogan opened his long eyes very wide.

"Marry another woman!" he repeated, slowly. "What can you mean?"

"I mean what I say; if you love me really—if you would be content to be loathsome and despised for my sake, surely you could make the lesser sacrifice of marrying a young and pretty woman."

"But I do not see how! Are you in earnest, Sophy?"

"So much in earnest, Alfred, that I would bless you for the rest of your days—

I would love the sound of your name if you would do me this service. Listen to me, it is not so impossible as you might imagine ; there is a girl coming here to-night."

"*The girl !*"

"Yes ; she is young and attractive, well-born, and rich in prospect."

"Prospect !" Mr. Cadogan repeated, in a meditative voice.

"It is Miss Lisle, the sister of that Gerald Lisle who owes you——"

"£4000 10s. 6*½d.*," Alfred said, promptly ; the tremulous languor of his tone quite merged in the quick business-like accents with which he recalled the extent of Gerald's obligation to him.

Mrs. Herbert smiled. "I wonder which passion is strongest in his mind," she thought ; "avarice, or that which he dignifies by the name of love."

Then walking to the door, she listened for a few moments to be certain there was no voice calling her amongst the murmurs

the wind was making round the house ; she could hear the patter of her children's feet overhead, and remembered that it was nearly time for her to go and give them her good-night kiss.

"I have yet ten minutes or so," she said, consulting her watch, and she returned to her place by Alfred Cadogan's side.

I need not enter into the details of their conversation ; it is sufficient to say that this woman, whose character stood so fair before the world and whose heart before God was so black, added yet a deeper stain to her soul that night, for she used the loveliness He had given her to persuade Alfred Cadogan to grievously wrong an innocent girl, pledging herself at the same time to do her good-hearted husband a still deeper injury, since her own rare beauty was the devil's bait by which her accomplice was to be lured into fulfilling her designs.

Mr. Cadogan perfectly comprehended the motive of her desire that he should marry

Miss Lisle ; he felt rather than knew that this woman was making a sacrifice of herself to him because of her love of another man, and in his heart he almost hated her for the concession thus made.

“She will do anything rather than let my milk-faced brother come near the woman she is anxious I should marry,” was his bitter reflection. But it consoled him to think of the anguish that brother would feel if Alfred succeeded in this scheme, and still greater was his satisfaction when he meditated on the noble estate to which Miss Lisle would probably succeed on the demise of her grand-aunt.

He took care, however, not to acquaint Sophy how much his own plans had coincided with her wishes ; she knew of the money lent to Gerald Lisle, but she did not know that Lynncourt was not entailed, and that Mr. Cadogan would never have perilled so large a loan to Gerald had he not some ulterior object in view.

Mrs. Herbert, shrewd and subtle as she was, was out-witted, since she was furthering Alfred's own designs when she proposed to make him acquainted with Esty Lisle, and the supplementary temptation she offered him was in reality unnecessary for the accomplishment of her scheme, at least, in so far as he was concerned. He did not tell her of all this; he was a man who, if his tradesman had accidentally underrated a charge, would have taken instantaneous advantage of the omission. It was not likely that he should throw away the additional boon Sophy was disposed to grant him. He sighed and looked miserable; he kissed her hand passionately, as if tempted beyond control by the prospect opened out to him of winning her love, or rather, of winning the semblance of it; and then he sighed again as though he found it impossible to make the self-sacrifice she advocated, even with such a prize in view.

Woman-like, she grew more eager as he appeared to waver. It is an attribute of her sex to be tenacious of purpose, and the tenacity grows in strength with every fresh instance of opposition. Before their interview was closed Mrs. Herbert was pleading earnestly for that which she had found it so difficult to propose half an hour previously.

Were this an age of miracles, surely the innocent lips of her children that night would recoil before the poison that had just polluted her own ; as it was, she embraced them calmly, and after finishing her toilette, descended the stairs arm in arm with her husband, and with him entered the drawing-room to welcome her guests.

The room was tenanted by visitors who were staying at the house, and while Mrs. Herbert waits the arrival of the rest of her party we will briefly describe the group already collected round her. The most

noticeable in person is Colonel Jasper Macpherson—notorious alike for gallantry and gallantries; foremost in the battle-field, and first in the boudoir, his success in both has been unequivocal. While other stars arise and set in the glory of London seasons, his has been a constant shining luminary ; albeit, he one day gave a severe shock to his worshippers by unwittingly permitting a lady to marry him ; why he did it was an enigma. The clubs could not solve it ; at Poodles and at Noodles there were oracular shakes of the head over this episode in Colonel Macpherson's life ; and henceforward he was always spoken of as " Poor Jas." His lady admirers were at first incredulous, then frantic, and finally, despairing ; but as years went on, and Mrs. Macpherson proved too well-bred to obtrude her claims to her husband's attentions, they agreed to consider Jasper's marriage in the light of one of his habitual acts of gallantry —a thing to be passed over in silence and

not to be regarded in any way as an obstacle to fresh flirtations.

He is bending down now to speak to his hostess, and his hair shines like a nimbus round his head; he is celebrated for the beauty of his hair and beard, which are of an extraordinary hue, resembling the effect of gold sunlight shining on snow. He is brave, courteous, and kind, but there is one defect in his character which can scarcely contribute to his happiness, namely, his deep-rooted incredulity in the existence of woman's virtue. If he were reasoned with on the subject by some enthusiastic youth, whose chivalry was not yet choked up by the ill weeds that grow in the soil of capitals, he would laugh and gently stroke his silvery moustache, as he said: "I dare say you are right, my dear boy, but the sex has always been kind to me, and why should I bother myself by thinking of hypothetical resistance which I never encountered?"

Close behind Colonel Macpherson is the graceful figure and bent head of Sir Charlton Desmond : his manners are fascinating in the extreme, their apparent simplicity being the very perfection of art ; and he looks better in the saddle, and rides straighter to hounds, than any other officer in her Majesty's army. He has an illusion that he is romantic ; if he were not a courtier, a man of the world who appreciates thoroughly all the world's luxuries, he fancies he would like to be a Spanish scaler of balconies, serenading under his mistress's window, or engaging in impromptu affrays for the love of a pair of black eyes ; and this is the impression he gives those young ladies who delight to listen to his chivalrous aspirations.

Practically, nothing would induce him to relinquish his ride in the row, his tailor in Bond Street, his daily papers, and his well-arranged dinners. Theoretically, he is a lover of deserted prairies ; of angry seas ;

of Italian fastnesses, where the brigands play bo-peep behind the vines, and pontifical gendarmes fraternize with *vi et armis* inheritors of the traveller's watch and chain; for the rest, he is generous-hearted, manly, and brave, and although many envy him his indefinable charm of manner, few can successfully imitate it.

He is bending his head now to address a young lady who sits on a sofa near him; she is an X—shire belle, her name, *Amelia Dayrell*, and her exceeding beauty has inspired Sir Charlton with a desire to ingratiate himself with her. The girl, for all her loveliness, has an ill-tempered expression of face; report says, that she is “a character,” and if to be “a character” implies leading a cat-and-dog life with her parents, and heaping unlimited oppression on the little heads of her brothers and sisters, she certainly justifies the epithet. Nature has given all the elements of refinement in those star-like eyes, those delicate

features, and that well-shaped head—it is an exquisite shell, but it is void of the soul that should have shone through such a surface. The mouth is marred by a petulant twitch, and the eyes reflect nothing but sullen dullness.

“Do you not envy Mr. Moens?” Sir Charlton asked, as he bent tenderly over his fair companion.

“What?”

“Do you not envy the al-fresco sort of life Moens passed with the brigands?” he repeated.

“They seemed to have been much troubled by fleas,” the girl said, shortly, and Sir Charlton turned away with a sigh. He could worship beauty, but he could not tolerate vulgarity; and he transferred his attentions to a young lady whose fat round face and snub nose did not prevent her from possessing far more elevated sentiments than she of the big eyes and perfect features.

Mrs. Herbert's other guests were now arriving in quick succession, and she looked eagerly towards the door at each fresh announcement. Mr. Cadogan also waited with some anxiety to hear the name of Lisle.

"I hope she will be good-looking," he murmured to Sophy. "I do so hate an ugly woman."

The words had barely left his lips when he noticed that Mrs. Herbert's cheeks turned pale under the roseate tinge that lay so delicately on them, and that she made a sudden start forward, and then as suddenly checked herself. Her ears had been quicker than his to hear the name of the woman she longed and yet loathed to see.

"Colonel and Miss Lisle," was being echoed by the servants from staircase to ante-chamber, and when Alfred removed his eyes from Mrs. Herbert, the last announcement of their names was sounding at the opposite door.

For a moment Sophy felt blinded by the rage that took possession of her. The consciousness that the woman Geoffry so much loved was near her, seemed to sting her heart with venom.

She prayed that she might find some deficiency of person or manner to prove the folly of his adoration, and then she looked up, and her eyes were scorched by the fairness of the face she saw before her. Miss Lisle was never more Miss Lisle, and less "Esty," than she was at this moment, as she came down the room on her father's arm, in a "shimmer of satin and gleam of pearls," her graceful, high-bred looking head unadorned, except by one wax-like hothouse flower, that was fastened by a gold hair-pin in the twisted coils of her hair. "Every inch a Lisle," the Colonel had said proudly, when he beheld his daughter dressed that night, for the first time, in a manner befitting her rank. And "Every inch a lady," Sir

Charlton whispered to Colonel Macpherson, as he noted the delicate arch of the satin-shod feet that peeped out from under those voluminous tulle draperies, and the turn of the little hand that carried Esty's bouquet of flowers, white, like her dress. "Who is she? Oh, a Lisle; granddaughter of the old countess at Lynncourt. Blood shows in the hands and feet, eh, Jasper?"

Colonel Macpherson shrugged his shoulders indifferently. "Not my style," he said, and he turned to Miss Dayrell, who was looking at Esty with all her eyes.

"What do *you* think of the new arrival, eh, Miss Dayrell?"

"Madame Elise," said Miss Dayrell, laconically; and the Colonel was mystified for a moment, until, following Miss Dayrell's glance, he perceived that it rested, not on Miss Lisle, but on Miss Lisle's skirts; and then he dimly conjectured that Madame Elise must in some way be connected with those sheeny folds of satin,

puckered so artistically under the weight of the Lynncourt pearls.

“ You must wear the duchess’s pearls,” the countess had said, when she superintended Esty’s toilette ; “ maybe it will purify them a bit to rest on your neck and shoulders.”

And so the fair young breast was circled round by jewels that had, nearly two hundred years ago, been dangled in the fingers of his most sacred and most lascivious majesty, King Charles the Second.

The pearls and the white draperies harmonized well with the pure colouring of the young girl’s white neck and cheeks,

“ Rose-tinted, like the inside of a shell.”

The sorrow that had clouded her face for so many days past could not take away the youthful lines that made up the grace of her features.

“ There’s nothing like youth, after all ; our fair hostess can never ‘ make up ’ into that appearance,” thought Sir Charlton,

and he determined to take the first opportunity of being introduced to the new comer.

“Allow me to present my daughter, to whom you have so kindly given this opportunity of making your acquaintance,” said Colonel Lisle, bowing to his hostess.

Mrs. Herbert held out the tips of her fingers, and murmured something about “being very happy,” although, if she had seen an asp settling that moment on Esty’s breast, she would not have raised her hand to brush the worm away.

Could she have spoken her thoughts she would have said, “I hate you for being loved by my lover; I hate you for being pretty; for having small hands and feet; for your soft voice and long eye-lashes; and I should like to scatter your white dress into shreds, and pull your hair down, and tear it up by the roots.”

Had the two been alone on a desert island, Sophy would undoubtedly have expressed these sentiments; but being in

society where savage instinct were subdued by *convenience*, she merely wreathed her lips into a forced smile, saying, “I did not know that you had a daughter so old as this; really, Miss Lisle is quite ‘grown up.’” The tone was patronising, and Esty felt the “putting down” it was meant to convey; her young blood fired up, and she answered for her father in a voice to the full as nonchalant as that of her rival.

“It is not unpleasant to have many years of youth still to look forward to,” she said, smiling.

Her tone was so gentle that none but a woman (or a man as shrewd as a woman) would have appreciated the sting of her remark; the sting lay in those wrinkles that had begun to mar the smoothness of Sophy’s forehead. Alfred Cadogan, who was standing near, caught a side glance of one of these, as Mrs. Herbert turned her profile to the light, and he laughed a low,

amused laugh, when he heard Esty's apparently artless retort.

"What creatures women are!" he thought, "they take to worrying each other as naturally as well-bred terriers gripe rats, only that rats are less venomous and dogs less savage than these gentle-looking darlings."

"She is very lovely, certainly," he whispered to Mrs. Herbert, as Esty and her father retired into the general circle; he enjoyed the baleful glance with which Sophy answered his observation. Much as he loved her, and he loved her intensely, after his own fashion, he rejoiced in her misery, guessing, as he did, what caused it. "Won't you introduce me?" he whispered.

Mrs. Herbert, with more abruptness than usually characterized her gentle manners, went through the formula of introduction, and requested Mr. Cadogan to take Miss Lisle down to dinner.

Dinner had already been announced, and in a few seconds Esty found herself seated between her companion and Sir Charlton Desmond. The latter was delighted with his position, and addressed Miss Lisle with that easy grace peculiar to him.

"I am an old friend of your father's, Miss Lisle," he said, blandly, "so I may be excused for claiming acquaintance with his daughter. I served under him when I was quite a lad: we were in Spain together. Ah! what days they were! Black eyes peeping from behind the lattices; bright swords flashing in dangerous juxtaposition with one's head; a constant flutter of handkerchiefs and whiz of bullets; a kiss and blow, you never knew which the hour might bring you; scanty rations and chestnut leaves for a feather bed: what a glorious life it was!" And Sir Charlton sighed, and seemed as if Esty's presence alone prevented his instant return to the land of olives.

Esty looked at him with interest ; then, observing that he seemed plunged in meditation, she hesitated to speak, fearing lest she might be disturbing some cherished reminiscence of the past. Sir Charlton himself broke the silence.

"I don't like it at all," he said, shaking his head.

"Like what?" Esty asked, rather mystified.

"This dinner *à la Russe* system. A man doesn't marry a wife or buy a horse unless he can have a good look at either of the desired objects, and yet one is expected to insult a delicate palate by eating recklessly of dishes of the composition of which we are profoundly ignorant. I like to study my dinner, Miss Lisle, before I consume it. If it be turbot, I like to see his beautiful sheeny sides as he lies in state on his silver bier, white damask for his shroud, and parsley for his grave-flowers. If it be wildfowl, I equally prefer beholding

the delicate morsel in its entire perfection to having it presented to me in a state of *disjecta membra*. The only dishes that are set before us are those which contain fruit—objects that one need have no hesitation in partaking of—that is to say, if they agree with you. A melon is a melon, and we have confidence in its internal structure, but it would require a necromancer to penetrate into the mysteries of a French dish concocted by an English cook."

Esty laughed. She had thought that Sir Charlton's fancy had strayed back in search of some of those eyes that haunted the dusky olive groves in Spain, and lo! he was deep in a sybaritic disquisition on eating. She looked up from her plate to make some trifling answer, when her eyes accidentally fell on an antique pin, which held together at the breast a delicate lace shawl Mrs. Herbert wore round her shoulders.

The gentleman who looked up to recognise on his butler's finger a ring which had once belonged to a murdered friend, could hardly have felt more sick at heart than Esty did at this moment. Surely it was the pin Geoffry had worn up to the very day he had left her. On it was a Medusa's head, beautifully cut; and the dull red snake that curled round the throat was broken at the tip of its tongue. There might be other pins similar in most respects to this one, but the blemish was peculiar, and the closer she looked, the more certain she was of the justice of her first suspicion.

"What does she do with it? When did she see him last?" she asked herself.

She sat with trouble in her heart for the rest of dinner, and felt glad when the signal came for the ladies to rise from table.

"She will do," Alfred said to himself, as he watched her disappear through the door. "She's too slight for my taste, but she's

undeniably good-looking. I will send Lisle a reminder to-morrow morning."

When he met Miss Lisle again in the drawing-room, he told her of his name, which had escaped her when Mrs. Herbert introduced him, and of his connection with "her friend, Geoffry Adair." He had the mortification to find that the indifferent expression of her face gave way to one of earnest animation, as, with her eyes all sparkling, she questioned him for news of his brother.

"He had none or little to give," he said, "excepting that, from a letter Adair had written to Mrs. Herbert, she imagined he was becoming attached to some lady who had accompanied him out."

Mr. Cadogan was not altogether inhuman, and he turned his face away from Esty as he inflicted this little stab. Miss Lisle's pain gave him no pleasure. He did not love her, and so had no hate to bestow on her.

"She will soon be consoled," he said, with a twirl of his moustache, as he caught sight of his dark face reflected in an opposite mirror. "There can't be two such fools as Sophy in the world."

"Do you sing, Miss Lisle?" he asked presently.

Esty answered abruptly "Yes," and then turned her face again towards the gloom of the fir trees outside the window near to where they stood.

"Miss Lisle sings, does she?" said Sir Charlton Desmond, coming up to them. "Pray, let us have some music, Mrs. Herbert. You sing divinely yourself, I know. Perhaps you will set a good example." He offered his arm to his hostess to conduct her to the piano, but she repulsed him gently.

"We must persuade Miss Lisle to honour us first," she said, looking straight into Esty's face.

She could read nothing there of the

effect of the wound she had dealt her enemy. The girl's face was as cold and haughty, if not as insolent, as her own, and she answered with perfect composure that she should "be very happy."

"Shall you require any one to play your accompaniment?" Mrs. Herbert asked, shortly.

"No, thank you," Miss Lisle said; "I play my own." And she walked up to the instrument. "What shall I sing?" (turning to Sir Charlton.)

"Anything you prefer. I myself should choose some old-fashioned melody more familiar to my ears than the wild anguish of the modern Italian school."

Esty paused for a moment, and then struck a few chords of the introduction to "Bid me discourse."

Sir Charlton looked delighted.

"Pray continue," he said. "If your singing is equal to your touch, I shall enjoy a rich musical treat."

In a few seconds the girl's voice had burst out in a rich volume of song, and the murmur of conversation in the room ceased like a storm subdued by an enchanter's wand. Rarely had such sweet thrilling notes filled Mrs. Herbert's drawing-room. The charm of the voice lay, not so much in the marvellous execution, which kept the ears of the audience in "a constant feeling of sweet surprise," nor in the bird-like trills she executed with such brilliancy in the upper scale, nor in the full melodiousness of her lower notes, as in the sympathetic thrill her tones excited in the breasts of her hearers. They held their breath as the last stroke warbled away into silence, and then Colonel Lisle had the pleasure of listening to such a deafening burst of applause as rarely greets the conclusion of an amateur's song.

Sir Charlton looked at Esty, his eyes glistening with pleasure.

"Your voice reminds me of some lines in Crashaw's conflict of the 'Nightingale and the Pipe,'" he said:

"Straightway she
Carves out her dainty voice as readily
Into a thousand sweet distinguished tones,
And reckons up in soft divisions
Quick volumes of wild note."

"The simile ends there, as I have not expired with my vocal effort," Esty answered, smiling. "Now I hope that Mrs. Herbert will favour us."

But Mrs. Herbert waived the subject of singing for the present. She never put herself in a position to appear less than other women. She was conscious that her tones after Esty's would have sounded husky and meagre. Hers was a voice pleasant enough to hear in the quiet gloom of a summer evening, when her eyes would gleam out from the dusk with an expression that doubled the charm of aught she sung; but here, in a brilliant glare of light, and with people's ears still haunted

by those musical shakes on the high A and B flat in which Esty had luxuriated, she felt she would perform under a disadvantage.

“Perhaps Miss Dayrell would play something?”

The sulky beauty rose from her chair, and, sitting down to the piano, played with immense rapidity a *Tarentelle*, the gay liveliness of which formed a strong contrast to her stolid expression of face.

“Very fine—very brilliantly played, indeed,” Mrs. Herbert said at its conclusion.

“It’s Kuhe’s,” Miss Dayrell muttered, with her usual abruptness, and she returned to her seat, paying no heed to the compliments which Mrs. Herbert showered on her.

Sophy, like many other fair tacticians, hoped, by excessive praise of “Lydia’s air and feature,” to throw a reflection on her sister performer as being an “ugly creature”—that is, by eulogy of Miss

Dayrell's performance to lessen the merit of Esty's.

Miss Lisle retired quietly into the background, meeting all the advances that were made her with a quiet dignity which surprised her father, who had not expected that the unruly, unkempt little girl of six years back would ever have developed into anything like this.

"A very successful evening indeed, my dear," he said in a gratified tone, as he and Esty returned home in the Lynncourt chariot. "I have had some most interesting conversation with Desmond—he and I served together under Lord Fitzmore Seymour. Oh, what a charming fellow he was! Dear! dear! he's dead now; so are most of the gallant fellows who turned their young faces towards the enemies' fire on the glorious 18th of June. It makes me feel like the last withered leaf on the tree—likely to be shaken off at any moment. And you have been looking very nice in-

deed, Esty; I had no idea you could sing so well. Desmond was quite charmed with you—he was really now."

"I am very glad, papa," his daughter said gently; and if the colonel was a little surprised at her lack of enthusiasm, he was quite contented with the delight Mrs. Lisle and Christine expressed, when they heard of the great success the party had been to their father and sister.

Colonel Lisle was set down at his own door, and then Esty went on alone to Lynn-court.

Relieved of the necessity of responding to her father's remarks, she leant her head against the side of the old-fashioned carriage window, and wept bitterly. As she passed the dark hedgerows through which the rain was patterning, she thought of the summer that was gone, when she had sauntered in those lanes, pulling at the tendrils of honeysuckle, and inhaling the warm scents that came over the clover fields.

"I shall never walk there again with him," she said passionately. "He never loved me; I was a new toy to him, just something to play with for an hour, and now he forgets that such a trifle existed. He is intimate with that dark woman, and she wears his token; he has been looking love at some other since he left me, and I have been imagining that his heart ached in absence from me, as much as mine has done."

"Wake me up when you return," the countess had said; so Esty went straight to her aunt's room, and kissed tenderly the withered cheek that lay on the pillow before her.

The countess awoke with a start.

"I'm so glad you've come, Esty. I've had such dreadful dreams. I thought that Barbara Villiers came out of her picture and demanded her pearls, and said she would catch her death of cold without them. I told her that you had gone to the Herberts with

them, and she said she would go after you. I suggested it would be dirty walking, and she laughed ; she shouldn't touch the ground, she said ; and she went with a rustle of her indecent draperies, which seemed to wake me up : no doubt it was the movement of your dress that did so. How has it been with you, my dear ? have you been happy ?”

The countess lifted herself on her elbows, and looked anxiously into her niece's face.

“ They tried to make me show my pain, aunt. That woman, that friend of Geoffry's, paraded signs of her intimacy with him, and then she watched to see if she could detect the wound in my face. All the evening my heart seemed dying within me ; but I would not show it. I talked and laughed and sang my best ; I swore that her cruel eyes should not know pleasure in my pain. But oh, auntie ! I don't think he will ever come back ; they say he already loves another, and, oh me ! I am so miserable !”

She knelt down and hid her face in her aunt's pillow.

The withered hand of the countess stroked the bowed head by her side, and her old heart beat high with pity and resentment.

" You mustn't believe all you hear, child," she said, with a faint attempt at consolation. " Lovers are so credulous they throw their whole hearts into their illusions, and they are equally unreasonable in their sudden disenchantments. How do you know that story about a new love is true?"

" Why didn't he write to me? Oh! why doesn't he write to me?" the girl cried, looking up with hungry eyes into the sympathizing countenance before her.

And the countess was dumb, only stroking the brown head the faster.

CHAPTER XI.

" If I have erred, there was no joy in error,
But pain, and insult, and unrest, and terror;
I have not, as some do, bought penitence
With pleasure, and a dark yet sweet offence."

SHELLEY.

MRS. HERBERT did not sleep well the night of her party ; she closed her ears and eyes to all outward sounds and sights, but she was haunted by the slender form of her rival and cursed by the remembrance of those marvellous tones. When the morning dawned, she was still lying awake, staring at the streaks of light in the east, and as soon as these were expanded into broad daylight, she jumped out of bed and walked up to a large swing mirror and looked at herself. How she despised the luxuriant

style of beauty which constituted her chief attraction !

"I should like to be slim, slender, and eighteen," she thought. "Ah me! why can't I be so as he would love me?"

She did not bestow much pity on the girl whom she had promised Geoffry she would befriend. A woman despised in her own love has rarely any soft place in her heart for a successful rival.

Mr. Herbert had a rough time of it that morning, when his wife decided that her bust was too expansive, her arms too massive, for true loveliness. He was glad when the breakfast was over, and he could retire to his library, leaving Cadogan to bear the brunt of Sophy's stormy brow and laconic speeches.

"What progress did you make?" she said shortly to Alfred, when they were left alone together.

"Hum! pretty well, I think," that gentleman answered complacently. "I told her

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seeing her aunt's visitors that day, and they were received alone by the countess, who was sitting up in state, her most valuable lace mittens on her arms, and a royal flow of drapery at her feet.

"Her niece was out in the grounds," she said, and she looked pleased when Mr. Cadogan took advantage of a pause in the conversation to say he would go and seek Miss Lisle, suiting the action to the word by stepping through the window on to the lawn.

"He is handsome, though rather sly-looking," the countess thought; but on her making some observation concerning Alfred to Mrs. Herbert, the latter responded by such a warm eulogium on that gentleman, such an eloquent panegyric on his manifold virtues, that the countess felt herself stirred by a secret delight when she saw the young couple emerge together from one of the shrubbery walks.

She longed desperately to avenge her niece's wrong on that fair-faced, black-

hearted man, who had made so bad a use of the hospitality proffered him for his dead mother's sake.

When Mr. Cadogan re-entered the room he was accompanied by Esty, who acknowledged Mrs. Herbert's presence with as much ease and composure as she had shown on the previous night.

"She does it well; the girl has pluck," Sophy thought, looking at her slender adversary with a sort of unwilling admiration. "I wonder how she will bear the last blow when it comes?"

Mrs. Herbert carried back with her to Castle Herbert a cordial invitation from the countess for herself and Mr. Herbert to dine at Lynncourt in the ensuing week.

"If Mr. Cadogan will accompany you," said Lady Renshawe, bowing to that gentleman with old-fashioned courtesy, "I shall be much honoured."

Sophy declined on her own and her husband's behalf. "Our house is so crowded

with people, that it is impossible for us to leave them," she said; "but it will be a real charity if you will allow Cadogan to come to you now and then; he gets so bored always seeing the same faces round my table, and he loves music so much, he will thoroughly appreciate Miss Lisle's singing."

"Pray come as often as you like," said the countess, in a cordial tone, turning to Alfred.

The latter murmured something about "not being slow to take advantage of such a tempting offer;" and then the callers withdrew, and the countess and Esty resumed their usual occupations.

CHAPTER XII.

“Who in want a hollow friend doth try,
Directly seasons him an enemy.”

KING HENRY III.

“Creditors! devils.”

TITUS ANDRONICUS.

MEANWHILE Gerald Lisle had been thrown into the utmost consternation by Cadogan's unexpected demand on him. “How am I ever to meet it—how tell my mother?” he asked himself in an agony. He was even ungrateful enough to curse Cadogan for having granted him the loan; but then what man ever does feel obliged to the friend who lends him money, and who exacts its return at a time when such a demand is as inconvenient to meet as was the embarrassment from which he relieved you?

“From frying-pan to fire,” grumbled

Gerald ; "and the fire is a d——d deal worse than the fry. There's an air about Cadogan's note which in a tradesman would be impertinent; from him it's positively offensive."

Gerald was down at Gardenhurst at the time he received this communication, and it caused him to go about the house with a worried look in his eyes, and a nervous irritability of manner that made his mother's heart ache.

"Some fresh difficulty," she moaned to herself. "Are we never to know the comfort of easy circumstances?"

As yet she said nothing to Gerald on the subject; his manner did not invite confidence; but she sat in terror every time he opened his lips, not knowing how much misfortune his words might bring to her.

She had a painful keen-sightedness in such matters, and she could read unpaid bill on her son's face as clearly as a drunkard's wife detects the first flush of intoxication.

Mrs. Lisle had felt very sad for Esty when she heard from the countess of Captain Adair's behaviour ; she entreated, however, that Colonel Lisle and the boys should not be made cognisant of what had passed.

"They are so hot-headed, and Egbert is at the same station with that man's regiment ; pray let us have no further mischief to increase poor Esty's unhappiness."

So the secret rested between aunt and niece ; and, with the exception of Mrs. Herbert and Mr. Cadogan, no one suspected the nature of the pain that had made Miss Lisle's face wear such a wistful expression for the last two months.

Winter was succeeded by spring, and still the Herberts lingered in X—shire. Mr. Cadogan came constantly to Castle Herbert, often prolonging his stay to a fortnight or three weeks, and generally contriving to spend at least half that period in Miss Lisle's society. He attended Esty in her walks, and listened at the piano when she

sang ; he brought her presents of new books, prints, and magazines, and paid her a thousand little attentions in so delicate and kindly a manner that Esty insensibly began to feel his society a pleasure and a relief.

The black thought in her heart weighed less heavily on her when she could converse with Cadogan on the subject of Geoffry's early days—that far-off time when he resembled the fair-faced miniature that still hung in the breakfast-room.

Geoffry had never told her how little he liked his half-brother, and Alfred quickly ascertained and took advantage of Esty's ignorance on this point. He invented a great number of anecdotes connected with his and Geoffry's boyhood, which proved that they had lived together on terms of warm affection. Esty felt quite a love for the dark face before her when she heard how many and how dire were the blows his constant love for and defence of Geoffry had exposed it to in those bygone days.

Mrs. Herbert, to the great astonishment of her X—shire neighbours, did not even go to town this fine season. George Herbert went up for the Session, but Sophy remained at the Castle with her children, and with occasional visitors to relieve the tedium of her solitude.

It need hardly be said that Sophy never fulfilled the trust Geoffry had reposed in her with regard to his letter to Lady Renshawe; it had long since shrivelled away into ashes, and all the letters she herself had received from him since his departure shared the same fate. These last were filled with such tenderness for his absent love that Sophy felt her hate of her unconscious rival deepen at every fresh line she read. Nevertheless she wrote encouraging answers to Geoffry, bidding him hope for the best, and to trust always to her friendship and Esty's affection. Latterly she had infused an air of constraint and doubt in her replies; but still she would not directly

avow that she suspected Esty's allegiance to be wavering. She feared such news might hasten his return to England, and she did not want him home yet awhile.

One morning Mrs. Herbert received a letter by the Indian mail which materially accelerated her plans.

In it Geoffry told her that he had obtained six months' leave, and was coming home as speedily as possible to plead his cause in person with Esty's parents. "I have come into a little more money by the death of a cousin of my father's," he wrote ; "I am positively a 'well-to-do' man, and now nothing need keep me from speaking out any longer." He also informed her that he had made the acquaintance of Egbert Lisle, who was in Peel's Naval Brigade at Cawnpore. "Lisle got badly wounded some time ago, and I rather think he will return home about the same time as I do. He is a noble fellow, and has covered himself with distinction. What

a pleasure the return of us both will be to Esty!" The letter concluded with a request that Mrs. Herbert "would give the enclosed" to Miss Lisle.

"It will keep hope fresh in her heart till I come. My kindest regards to Herbert.

"P.S.—I thought the last message you sent me from Esty seemed rather cold. She should remember what kind of a punishment it would be to a starving man to receive a bit of bread no bigger than a pea, and how my soul yearns for every little token of her. A line with her name in it is dearer to me than folios from other people. So write always of her—not that you will be troubled to send me many more letters, as I hope to be home in October. Yours, G. ADAIR."

"No time to be lost!" muttered Mrs. Herbert, as she dropped Geoffry's "enclosure" into the fire. "I will go over to Lynncourt to-day."

CHAPTER XIII.

"Be sure
You credit anything the light gives light to
Before a man; rather believe the sea
Weeps for the ruin'd merchant when he roars;
Rather, the wind courts but the pregnant sails
When the strong cordage cracks; rather, the sun
Comes but to kiss the fruit in wealthy autumn,
When all falls blasted. If you needs must love
(Forc'd by ill fate), take to your maiden bosoms
Two dead-cold aspicks, and of them make lovers;
They cannot flatter nor forswear; one kiss
Makes a long peace for all!"

MAID'S TRAGEDY.

MEANWHILE Mr. Cadogan had a long interview with Gerald Lisle, and decided that he could wait for his money a little while longer. When Esty next went home her brother's eyes followed her with a wistful expression in them which she could not comprehend. Before many weeks were over, she understood only too well the

pathos of those entreaties that "did not speak," but "looked her in the face," until, like the hapless betrothed in the Scotch song, "her heart was like to break." "I would do anything for him but *that*," she thought, but ere long Gerald was at pains to explain to her that there was nothing else she could do. Her heart had never sickened so much for news of her absent lover as it did at this juncture. She prayed so earnestly for him to come back to her that she at last, from the very intensity of her entreaties, began to have a vague hope they might be answered.

"Only to have some kind of news of him. That would be better than nothing. This silence is so dreadful to bear."

It came at last—the intelligence of the name she craved to hear—but in such fashion that she would have given worlds to have been able to go back to the old uncertainty, the old sorrow, in which at times a thread of hope still shone silver-bright.

Mrs. Herbert accompanied Mr. Cadogan to Lynncourt the very day she received her last packet of Indian letters, and after conversing for some little time on indifferent subjects, she, as though by accident, introduced Captain Adair's name.

"You knew him, I think?" she said, addressing the countess.

The elder lady answered stiffly she had had that honour, and Esty looked out of the window to conceal the flush that rose to her cheeks, and toyed with a hot-house rose that stood in a flower-pot on the sill.

"Then you will be interested to hear that he is married."

"Married!" the countess said, and there was dead silence for a few moments. Alfred was the first to speak.

"You have torn your hand, Miss Lisle, with those thorns; pray let me extract them for you."

"Thank you," the girl said, sweetly.
"How do you know of Captain Adair's

marriage?" she added, turning to Mrs. Herbert.

"From this paper;" and Sophy handed her a copy of the *Overland Mail*.

Sure enough there were some letters staring her in the face—letters horribly large and distorted that seemed to shape the name of Adair.

"*Captain G. Adair, to Frances, only daughter of the late J. Maxwell, Esq.*" Thus the announcement ran.

"Thank you," Miss Lisle said, returning the paper to Sophy with a steady hand. "I suppose there is no mistake?"

"Oh, no!" Mrs. Herbert replied, with a slight touch of insolence in her tone. "I should think not; why should there be? Young men generally marry when they go out to India: they find it dull, you know, Miss Lisle."

"True," assented Esty: and the carriage being announced, she bowed out her visitors with the same quiet ease that had

characterised her manner during the whole interview. The door had closed, and the sound of their wheels had died away in the distance before Esty turned her face to her aunt.

“Don’t be afraid, darling,” she cried, in a harsh, unnatural voice. “I can bear it. I shan’t die ; but I can never have faith in anything again. I have lost all—all. Pray God to soften my heart so that I may live to believe once more in His goodness !”

“How did you manage the newspaper ?” Alfred asked, admiringly, of his coadjutor, as they drove home together.

“Very simply ; I sent the announcement, through a friend in Calcutta some time ago, to the paper, with the proper fee for its entrance ; it will be contradicted in the next number, but she won’t see it. Meanwhile, it is your turn, Alfred ; the Lisles are as poor as rats ; the old lady is already prejudiced in your favour. You

~~CADOGAN'S~~

"I never took you for if you
had taken your advantages,"
he said. "See me," he said;
and his master dancing first out of one
window and then another. He was sure there
was no master in those lonely roads to
make such a demand.

"The Esq. was home. She found
him pale and despondent in the fires dear
to him."

"Mrs. Lacy had been driven down by a
coach to us, and Gerald wished by the
week before an army of nurses and appre-
hension."

"It's the worry and anxiety that's
broken her down," he said. "Cadogan is
so imperturbable, and she knows I
can't meet his claims. Oh, Esq., you might
as well go as I would."

CHAPTER XIV.

"He chid the billows that their course delay'd
His heart that swifter sped than waves could flow;
The ship was laden with his hopes and fears;
Joy laughed in every breeze that fair did blow,
While adverse winds were filled with lovers' tears."

A. C. STEELE.

"WE shall sight land to-morrow, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

The seaman who had answered Captain Adair's interrogation whistled a low tune of content as he ran up the shrouds with even more than usual activity.

Great animation prevailed on board the Queen of the Isles. Faces that looked ill-favoured, thin, and weary, during their long captivity on the waters, became quite radiant with comeliness; peevish women forgot to murmur complaints as their hearts

fluttered at the notion of the near approach of home, and the re-union of ties so long dis-severed by absence—so long, indeed, that in some cases little nervous doubts clung to high-wrought anticipations ; and one of the ladies, a withered woman of forty, who had left England a blooming bride twenty years before, candidly avowed that “the links had been so long broken, she should not in the least know where to hook on *her* part of the chain again.”

But these depressing forebodings only existed in exceptional cases ; the majority of the ship’s passengers were in a state of feverish happiness.

“I seem to smell flowers already,” said one.

“I am quite sure I saw something white just then, which looked like a bit of cliff.”

“Do tell me,” pleaded another, “isn’t that the shore ?” and then there would come a rush of eager faces to the side of the deck, to catch a glimpse of that which had only

loomed in the hopeful imagination of the speaker.

The hot plains, the vivid skies, the dark faces he had left behind him, faded very quickly from Captain Adair's mind; the past year seemed to be blotted from his memory. His thoughts flew back over that chasm to an evening which appeared to him but as yesterday. Once more he stood at the garden gate at Lynncourt, with the soft veil of the morning mist hanging like a silver shroud over the meadows; he could almost fancy he heard the gate move on its hinges, as Esty came through it, and he felt the clinging pressure of her arms round his neck, as she sobbed her farewell words on his breast.

"I will be true, Geoffry; come what may, I will be true to you."

"I know she has kept her word," he murmured. And he lifted up his head and turned a beaming face towards a light bank of clouds that lay in the west. "England

is behind them," he thought,—“England and Esty;” and then he vented his restlessness by walking quickly up and down the deck.

“How the hours will lag to-night!” he said, half aloud.

A middle-aged, rough-looking man, who stood looking out at the side, with his hands thrust into the pockets of his pea-jacket, turned round at the exclamation.

“You’ll be glad to get on shore again, sir?” he said, interrogatively. “Maybe you’ve been away a long time from England?”

“Only a year,” Captain Adair said, feeling rather ashamed of the short period of exile, “but it seemed a hundred,” he added, candidly. “And you?”

“Oh, sir, I’ve been away these twelve years.”

“And are you not glad to come back?” Captain Adair asked, looking absently at the gleam made by a porpoise’s back, as it

bobbed up between the clefts of a wave. He spoke more from courtesy than interest, for joy makes people selfish, and his ears were still troubled by the sound of that garden gate.

“ Ay, sir, truly I shall ; I’ve sweated away twelve of the best years of my life in a shipping office at Calcutta, that I might earn enough to keep my wife and the babes from want ; and I’ve worked double tides to get the chance of this one holiday. I couldn’t have kept going all this weary time if it hadn’t been for the hope of having one year in cool, shady England, with my wife at my side, and my children by my knee. Lord, sir, I’ve lain in my hot, stifling bed at night, with those mosquitoes playing the devil’s own delight round my curtains, until I’ve almost cried to think of the mulberry bough flapping against the window at home, and my wife, dear soul, resting her little head on her pillow, with nothing to torment her but a few harmless

gnats, and, maybe, the thought that I was pining to death for her and the children."

"I suppose they were very young when you left them?" Geoffry said, kindly.

"A boy and a girl—one two, the other one year old. Oh, dear! they were fat-legged, toddling darlings then, with just a wisp of yellow hair on their round heads, and now they'll be too big to take on my knee, and the father that begot them will be like a stranger to them."

It was the speaker's turn to look absently into the waves, which he did, with a sigh and a smile, while Geoffry took advantage of the pause to take another hasty turn up the deck. Then he came down again to the spot where the steerage passenger was still standing.

"We shall see land to-morrow morning, they say," Geoffry observed, repeating the information the seaman had given him an hour before.

His companion turned round with a deep

glow on his sunburnt face. "Yes, sir," he said, "I heard so." Then with a gleam in his eyes which made his scarred, wrinkled visage look almost beautiful, he looked up at the sky : "I thank Him from my heart; I thank Him that He has brought me thus far towards them. Praise be to Him!"

"Amen," said Captain Adair, softly; and, bidding his companion good-night, he returned to his old place on deck.

"This is the last evening we shall spend together," said one of the passengers, an old Anglo-Indian officer, as they sat at dinner that afternoon. "Let us drink, first, the captain's health, and many thanks to him, for he's——" The veteran paused for an appropriate epithet:

"A regular brick," suggested a youth from a distant corner. And amidst much laughter this sentiment was taken up and cordially endorsed by the company.

Many other toasts were drunk, champagne glasses clinked rapidly against one

another, and stiffness and constraint melted away under the genial feeling of happiness that pervaded the whole company.

“We’ve had a fair voyage and prosperous weather,” the captain said modestly, in answer to the compliments showered upon him. “No thanks are due to me; but don’t forget, ladies and gentlemen, when you take your last night’s rest in the ship’s berths to-night, to render thanks where thanks are due. And now for our parting pledge : ‘Here’s to the Queen of the Isles, and those who are waiting for her at home.’”

Amidst uproarious cheers, waving of handkerchiefs, and general shaking of hands, the dinner came to an end, and Captain Adair, flushed and happy, ran up on deck to enjoy the calm of the coming night alone with his cigar.

The moon had risen, and all the line of ocean under her beams shimmered like liquid silver. The black hull, the spars, the cordage, and the tapering mast of the

Queen of the Isles, threw long shadows over the waves, that trembled round her as she passed through the moonlight, her sails flapping idly in the soft peacefulness of the summer night. The waves parted gently before her queenly bow, and then fretted and bubbled at her wake as she swept on, leaving her trace in a long troubled line behind her.

Geoffry was aroused alike from his meditations and from his cigar by hearing the sound of low sobs coming from what seemed to be a diminutive bundle of clothes huddled up in the corner of a seat to his right. He walked up to the object in question, and found it to be a little girl known to him by the name of Norah Moore, an orphan, who was being conveyed to England in the charge of an ayah. The child, who was about eight years old, had not been a favourite with the passengers; her pale pinched face, as well as her depressed and apparently sullen

manner, had militated against her claims to popularity. There were plenty of pink-cheeked, blue-eyed cherubs on board, whose mothers were present to appreciate the compliments paid them; but this pale, dark-eyed little girl had nobody—nobody, at least, but her ayah, Marian, of whom she was afraid, and a pet canary, on which she doated. It was the loss of her favourite which was causing the bitter sobs Geoffry heard as he approached her.

“What is it? Who is it?” he said at first; but when he got up to her he knelt at her side, and pulled the tear-stained face into the moonlight. “Why, dear, what is the matter? what has hurt you?” the young man asked, tenderly.

The child, melted alike by sorrow and his tone of sympathy, threw her little thin arms round his neck and sobbed still more.

“Do tell me what it is; I can’t help you if you don’t. Is it because your nurse has left you? Shall I go and find her?”

"No, no, *no!*"

"What is it, then? Stop, you will catch cold; let me wrap your shawl round you. Now I'll take you for a walk, and you shall tell me all about it."

And, hoisting her on his shoulders, Geoffry carried his self-imposed charge rapidly up and down the deck, having a vague idea that all children were soothed from tears to sleep in that manner.

"Do you know we shall be in England to-morrow? Shan't you be glad to see the flowers and the trees again? Shan't you be glad to get home?" Captain Adair suggested presently.

"I haven't got a home," the little girl said, with fresh tears gathering in her dismal black eyes.

"What do you mean? I heard that you were to go to your aunt, and of course she will love you and take care of you."

"But it won't be like home," the child answered, piteously. "Papa and mamma

won't be there, and now I haven't even got Lulu to take with me."

"And who was Lulu?"

"My poor little canary. He would whistle all day, and sit on my finger ; and he was always gay when everyone else was cross ; and he'd say 'sweet' to me, and drink from my hand ; and now he's dead, and his dear little feet are all twisted and stiff ; his eyes are dull—and oh, I wish I were dead with him, I do !"

"Hush, hush!" Geoffry said, gently. "Where is he? Show him to me." Setting the child down, he followed her to the seat from whence he had taken her. There, under the bench, was the cage containing the dead bird, and Norah drew the latter forth from its now useless wicker prison with as much care and tenderness of touch as though her tiny friend were still able to ruffle his plumage on her friendly finger.

"Poor little fellow!" said Geoffry, kindly.
"What killed him?"

"I do not know."

"Well, what can I do? Would you like to bury him?"

The child's eyes brightened a little.

"Yes," she said; "she would like to bury him herself."

So Captain Adair went in search of an old cigar-box, which he brought back filled with cotton wool; and the hand which only a few months before was clenched tight on the hilt of a sabre doing good work at the head of the — Horse, emulated the gentleness of the child's touch as it assisted her to inter Lulu in its impromptu coffin.

"There, now; let me fling over the cage too; it will only remind you of him."

Norah, with a sigh and a gulp, listened to the double splash in the water, and then wept again, but not so bitterly as before; for Geoffry had given her what all human beings yearn for, whether old or young—sympathy; and "he was really sorry," she thought, "not making believe." So she

held up her face to her new friend with a half-choked "Thank you," and "Good-night," for a dusky face appeared behind her, and the ayah summoned her long-neglected charge to "come to bed."

Geoffry bent down and kissed the little pale face.

"I will see you again," he said, "and I will buy you another little bird, a bullfinch, for you won't care about another canary after Lulu."

The child nodded and whispered, "I will pray for you and Lulu to-night."

Her little figure disappeared, and Geoffry walked to the side to have a parting look at the moonlit sea before he "turned in" himself.

"Poor little soul!" he said, his thoughts reverting to his late *protégée*. "What a sad thing for her to be so alone in the world! 'Ocean, thou mighty monster,' accept the last end of the last cigar I shall smoke on you for many a day to come;" and tossing

the calcined bit of tobacco overboard, Geoffry turned on his heel and went down to his berth, humming a verse of a rough sort of duet he had heard both soldiers and sailors singing in chorus when the Naval Brigade were on shore at Cawnpore :

“SAILOR (*Solo*).

“There are soldiers and sailors and lieutenants also,
And there’s captains and admirals, as we all very well do
know,
And they fill their insides at th’ expense of poor men :
May the d——l ram-jam and hammer them !
Said the soldier, ‘Amen.’”

The duet purported to be between representatives of both professions. Whatever the sailor said the soldier affirmed with “Amen,” and *vice versa*. In chorus the amens sounded very imposing ; and the natives, when they heard it, used to fancy that the infidels were singing a hymn over their rations. The song goes on loyally to commend our “good Queen” for the contribution she has made to the ranks of both services, and concludes with a blessing on

her, and the reverse to those commanders who were personally unpopular.

“And the next thing I'll pray for is the good of all men,
And whatever I do pray for, you must answer, ‘Amen!’”

With the last “Amen” Geoffry's head disappeared below stairs, and the deck was left untenanted by all save the watch.

Meanwhile a cloud no bigger than a man's hand passed over the moon, and the wind began to freshen. By the time Captain Adair was in his “first sleep” it had veered round to E.N.E.

CHAPTER XV.

“Beneath thy tide, ah! silent now they roll,
Or strew with mangled limbs thy sandy shore;
The trumpet’s call no more awakes their soul;
The battle’s voice they now shall hear no more.
In vain the constant wife and feeble sire,
Expectant, wish their lov’d return to see;
In vain their infants’ lisping tongues inquire,
And wait the story on their father’s knee.”

PENROSE.

“His wearied feet no more his will obey;
His arms hang useless, and forget to play;
Borne by the surge, supine and void of breath,
He drinks the briny wave, and draws in death.”

COOKE’S MUSÆUS.

CAPTAIN ADAIR slept soundly and sweetly for the first two hours of the night, and then his slumbers were disturbed by a dream. He dreamed that he was somewhere under the sea, in a place where all was shadow; and through the shadow he saw the forms of men, women, and children walking together hand in hand. He went up to address a group of them. They never

turned their heads, but glided on, seemingly unconscious of his appeal. Then a youth passed him who had died on board shortly after the vessel left Calcutta, and on his finger he held Norah's canary. He nodded gaily to Geoffry. "I'm glad you're coming," he seemed to say. "We've got to walk here for hundreds of years, and we are always glad of fresh company. Geoffry turned and essayed to fly, but stumbled over a heap of lead which the phantoms had cast from their feet, and then he fell with a sob and a splash, and awoke—awoke with sweat on his forehead to the sound of great commotion on deck, mixed with the rush of a strong wind and angry waves. Geoffry's first exclamation was:

"Where the d—— are my pistols and boots?" Then, as his brain became clearer, he understood that there was a mightier enemy at the gates than sword or pistol could rebut, and, hastily putting on a few clothes, he rushed up on deck.

“What is it?” he asked of a sailor, who hurried by him with marks of agitation in his face.

“It’s blowing a gale, sir, and we haven’t made any way for this last half hour ; she’s driving up tide to the shore.”

“Good God!” muttered Geoffry, and he made his way up to the captain, who, surrounded by crowds of white eager faces, was endeavouring to make his voice heard through the howl of the tempest. Her engines had ceased to have any effect on the Queen of the Isles ; the wind rushed through her cordage with increasing violence every minute, and her timbers seemed to start with the violence of the strain put upon her.

“Lower the maintop-sail.” The order was obeyed with great difficulty, but the vessel still drifted ; and ere the hands could be got above to furl the sail again, there came a mighty rush of wind—and it fluttered away in shreds.

The port and starboard anchors were let

go, and all the port-chain paid out, for they yet hoped to bring up the ship; but the cable snapped, and she drove on as though the fury of the blast meant to give her no respite from quick and certain destruction. They were now not more than half a mile from the land, for the sight of which they had so pined in the morning—the touch of which was to bring them death to-night.

Wild cries rose up amidst the uproar of the elements; wails of human beings brought unexpectedly, in the full tide of health and hope, to face the agonies of violent death. “The rocks—the rocks—we are driving on the rocks! Oh, captain, is there no hope?”

The captain turned round: “I have done; I will do to the last all I can, but they who have offended God had best make their peace with *Him*, while there is yet time.”

The scene on board now became one of indescribable confusion: through the dark-

ness voice called to voice for succour, rarely to obtain an answer. The seas broke over the decks with terrific fury ; some clambered frantically over the obstacles on the slippery decks, others descended to the saloon, where a clergyman was breathing a few earnest prayers to his terror-stricken congregation, who cowered round him in various attitudes of despair. Parents embraced their children with the desperate anguish of those who fear each kiss may be the last. The old Anglo-Indian who had toasted the captain so cheerily at dinner-time stood with his arm round his daughter, smoothing her hair with a helpless, piteous movement of his hand, and looking up to Heaven with unutterable pleading in his eyes.

“ Death in the foughten field
He oft had met ;”

but death, amidst shrieks of women and children, with his own daughter by his side—he had never dreamt of such a termination to his honoured career as this. The

girl looked up in his face with a sort of ecstasy in hers. "We are together, dear," she said, simply; and the old man clasped her hand tight, though he did not dare to meet her eyes.

The ship swept on her fatal course, battered by shrieking wind and raging sea, like some beautiful soul perverted and driven to destruction by a relentless demon. They were now so near the rocks that the surf which rebounded from them swept over the ship's sides.

"*It's coming,*" said Geoffry to himself; then he stepped up to the captain: "Can I do nothing?"

"Nothing; excepting that if by any chance you survive this night, bear witness to the efforts my crew have made to save the ship."

"And you?"

"I must perish, of course. Good-bye! God bless you!"

"God bless you, sir!" and Geoffry wrung

his friend's hand warmly, and then ran down-stairs to the saloon. In a moment his quick eye singled out his little friend of the afternoon ; her ayah was lying by her side convulsed with abject terror ; the child looked more puzzled than alarmed, but she smiled when she saw Geoffry.

He caught her up in his arms, and rapidly ascended on deck again. "Listen, dear," he said, earnestly : "I am going to try and save you and myself, but you must do everything I tell you—or we shall both die."

"I promise," Norah said ; and Geoffry now began to consider how he was best to seize a last chance for dear life.

He was so young, so full of hope—he could not bear to think of the sudden end of it all. His love was waiting for him at home ; how would she bear to be told of his death ? He could not, would not die ; but when he saw how near the rocks were, his heart sank within him. He lifted up his

head : “Oh, God, in Thee do I put my trust !”

“Aye ; we thanked him a little too soon !”

Geoffry, turning, saw the steerage passenger in an attitude of deep dejection, leaning on a cask. “Cheer up, mate !” said Geoffry, “we’re not dead yet : while there’s life there’s hope.”

“Is it not hard,” the man cried, flinging up his arms, and apparently not attending to Geoffry’s words, “to have given me the life of a dog all these years, and now to murder me in very sight of shore—with my hand almost touching my home—with my wife listening to every step that comes with a heart that’s beating and longing for me—for me, who by to-morrow morning will be—dead ?” And with this last word the man’s voice sank into a wail, and he buried his head again in his arms.

Every now and then the boom of a minute-gun pealed out the ship’s distress, but it

found no echoing on shore, and the doomed company in the saloon sat looking at each other with the fear of death in their eyes.

Nothing could surpass the order and regularity with which the captain's commands had been carried out; the men worked with the quiet precision of a fête day. It is under circumstances like these that the British sailor proves that he has not degenerated one whit since the old heroic days of Nelson and Collingwood.

In times of darkness and of storm, when timid hearts fail and the noblest courage quails before the uproar of elements that seem to shriek destruction in the ears of their victims, our blue jacket rises superior to the horror of the hour. Calm, resolute, and devoted, he puts forth all his strength to confront the peril—braving death with a chivalry that renders the manner of it an example for all time—to all men.

"Mates," cried the captain, as the vessel drove yet nearer to the rocks, "you've

worked like good sailors and gallant men. One cheer, lads!" and cheer they actually did—three such earnest hurrahs as had never before rung through broken masts and falling shrouds. Ere the sound died away the ponderous hull of the ship was dashed through the seething foam of the next wave as though it were a plank. There was a pause, followed by a wild shout of mingled groans, prayers, shrieks, and execrations, and the Queen of the Isles struck on a reef of rocks. Ere many minutes were over, she had parted amidships, and her maddened occupants were clinging on to her sides—to spars—to every bit of plank that seemed to promise a momentary refuge from the boiling sea beneath them.

As the ship snapped asunder, Geoffry was tightening the silk scarf with which he had bound his little charge to his back. He seized a rope, and was about to spring over the lee-side of the parted wreck, when he felt some one pull his arm. He turned

impatiently, and recognised a fellow-passenger—a lady who during the voyage had been chiefly remarkable for an affectation of helplessness and fine “ladyism.” Poor soul ! there was no false colour in the livid tinge of her cheeks now. Her eyes nearly started out of her head as she flung herself at Geoffry’s feet.

“ Take my child, for God’s sake, Captain Adair ! Save my child !”

A boy clung round her neck—a beautiful child of two years old, who was sobbing piteously, wailing out his weak treble among the other cries that ascended in vain to Heaven that night :

“ Mamma, mamma, take me away ! I so cold, I so frightened !”

“ You hear him !” the mother cried, in a hoarse voice. “ Oh man, man ! what can I do ? Must my boy die—my own babe ? must he be swallowed up *there* ?”

The woman groaned as she saw a large column of wave rise up over a group

of wretches struggling amidst the broken spars round the ship, sucking them down as it broke.

"I must first do what I can *here*," Geoffry said, pointing to his burthen. "This poor orphan has no one but me. God has given her a father in her need, and nothing but death shall separate us. But if you will wait here—if you have presence of mind to keep where you are till I come back—I swear that if I live I *will* come back and do my best for you."

He seized the rope, and jumped—a big jump—to get clear of the people who still crowded the shore-side of the wreck. The mother looked after him, helplessly.

"He can never come back," she thought, "and my boy will die. Hush, Arthur! oh hush, darling!" and she sat herself down to the task of sheltering and soothing the child as if, poor soul! he were safe in his crib at home. "If I could only get him to sleep," she thought. "It might come

without his knowing." And with Spartan self-control she tried to attune her husky voice to a sort of lullaby, to which the child was accustomed to be persuaded into slumber.

Meanwhile Geoffry had found his powers as a swimmer chiefly useful in enabling him to dodge the broken pieces of spars which kept threatening to crush him. He was so fearful of Norah's getting hurt in this manner that he wasted some strength in turning from right to left, instead of making straight for the rocks, as he wished to have done.

The cries of the drowning were getting fainter in his ears now; the roar of waters blinded and deafened him; and he was seized with a terror lest he should lose his senses, and die unconscious. Presently a bit of raft drifted near him, and, feeling his limbs getting stiff, he clutched at this frail support with the faint hope that it might wash him in towards the rocks. It

did so, and in another instant he was in the white foam of the sea's recoil, in the very grasp and clinch of death. He struggled madly to catch hold of the seaweed, but felt it slipping from his grasp, when a light flashed out above his head, and just as the advance of the next wave swept him off his feet, friendly hands clutched hold of his arms and shoulders, and caught him up beyond reach of his enemy. For a second or two the young man lay breathless where they landed him; then he struggled up again:

"Take care of the child," he said.
"Some of you lash a rope round me; I must go back to the wreck."

"No, no, no!" cried a dozen voices.
"You're half dead now; you're saved by a miracle. Don't tempt Providence again."

"I *must* go back," he reiterated. "Here, steady this rope for me, and take care of the child if I don't return."

He did not dare wait another minute, lest the wreck should be soaked in under the waters before he could get to it, and his promise to the mother and child have been made in vain. He had nothing on but his linen trousers and shirt, which latter, lying open on his chest, displayed its noble proportions as he ran back a few paces to take his next "header."

"What a fine fellow!" a woman said. "What a pity——." And then her observation was lost in the cheer which followed Geoffry as he plunged once more into the surf.

He never recollects very clearly what passed during the next twenty minutes. He swam until his arms fell lax by his side, and a deadly faintness came over him. A violent blow on the temple from a spar made the blood flow, and he fancied the pain restored him to consciousness. Once more he struggled on, sometimes swimming, sometimes holding to bits of raft and float-

ing. Once his hand went to his throat in search of a gold chain and locket that hung there. The touch of this trinket inspired him with fresh energy. Surely there was something black before him. Was it the hull of the perishing vessel? Yes; and there was the white fold of a woman's dress fluttering above. Geoffry flung up his arms:

"I am come," he cried; "but I——" His head sank on his breast, and the water sucked in the remainder of his speech. "Father!" the drowning man called. "Esty!" and then he lost all consciousness. He did not hear the cry of hope that broke from the survivors still clinging to the rafts—the return-gun that now boomed from the shore. He could not see the eager eyes in the woman above, who continued to rock her child in her arms while she watched the speck of white that was advancing rapidly towards the dismantled ruins of the Queen of the Isles, and which was greeted with voices which

had yet a thrill of hope in them, as they shouted, "The life-boat! the life-boat!"

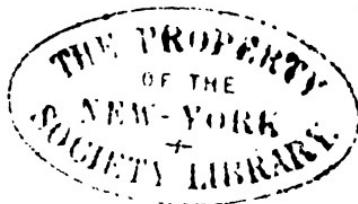
When the next morning dawned, the gale had blown itself out. A pleasant breeze just ruffled the edge of those health-smelling waves, and had it not been for the dark rugged splinters of rafts and spars, which could now and then be seen undulating between sand and sea, as the latter first cast them from and then lapped them back into its depths, and the groups of men who stood here and there along the beach, forming ominous circles round some prostrate object — but for these symptoms no one could have guessed, from the aspect of that peaceful ocean, those filmy cloudlets that drifted under the blue sky, what a tragedy of horror, what heart-rending prayers and miserable partings, had chronicled the hours of the past night.

It was, indeed, a glorious morning! At Lynncourt the sun shone brightly on the

ivy-crusted walls of the old chapel; and as early as eight o'clock the village school children were rehearsing their part in the day's ceremony by dropping daisies around the feet of their tallest companion, who for the occasion represented the bride elect.

And while Geoffry lay on a pallet in a fisherman's hut, wandering in delirium, with hands that never ceased to clutch the locket that rested on his heart, and with lips which, among many incoherent sentences, always ended by blending with them the name of Esty Lisle—while with eyes which had no consciousness in them, but which seemed to be fixed on some far-away object, he called for Esty to come to him—to hold his hand—to take away the band that weighed down his forehead—she was standing under the shadow of the Crusaders' monument that towered by the side of the altar in Lynncourt chapel. Amidst the clang of bells and murmur of congratulations, she was passing up under

the yew avenue that lined the churchyard path, her arm linked in that of Alfred Cadogan, and her heart wishing with all its power that it could stay at rest under one of those grey headstones that lay beyond the trees, and never beat again to vex her by its perpetual self-reproach.

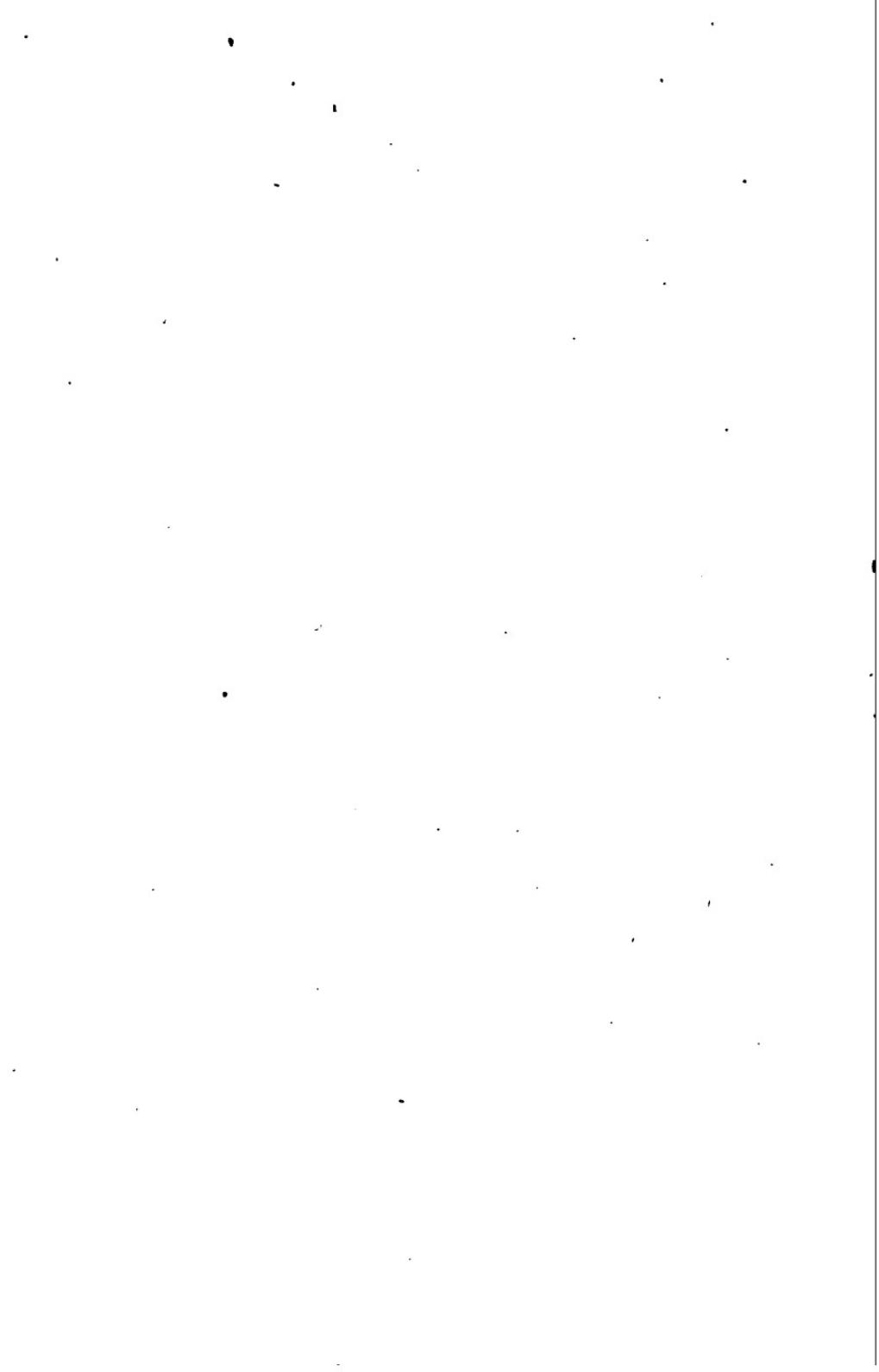


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